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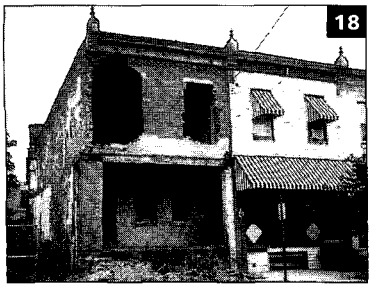

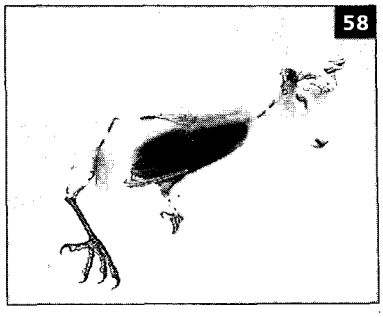

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REASON (ISSN 0048-6906) is published monthly except combined August/September issue by the Reason Foundation, a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization, 3415 S. Sepulveda Blvd., Suite 400, Los Angeles, CA 90034-6064. Periodicals postage paid at Los Angeles, CA, and additional mailing offices. Copyright© 2000 by Reason Foundation. All rights reserved. Reproduction or use, without permission, of editorial or graphic content is prohibited. Reason and Free Minds and Free Markets are registered trademarks owned by the Reason Foundation. **SUBSCRIPTIONS:** $19.98 per year. Outside U.S. add $10/year surface, $55/year airmail. Address subscription correspondence to Reason, P.O. Box 526, Mt. Morris, IL 61054, 815-734-1102. For address change (allow six weeks), provide old address and new address, including zip code. **UNSOLICITED MANUSCRIPTS** returned only if accompanied by SASE. **INDEXED** in Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature, InfoTrac, Historical Abstracts, Political Science Abstracts, America: History and Life, Book Review Index, and P.A.I.S. Bulletin. Available on microfilm from University Microfilms International, 300 North Zeeb Rd., Dept. P.R., Ann Arbor, MI 48106. **Printed in the United States. POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to Reason, P.O. Box 526, Mt. Morris, IL 61054. Publications Mail Sales Agreement No. 1476696.

The AWOL Electorate

What we can learn from "vanishing voters"

By Nick Gillespie

Pieter Brueghel's 16th century painting "The Fall of Icarus" provides a sly commentary on the tale about flying too close to the sun. Rather than being at the center of Brueghel's painting, the overreaching Icarus is visible only as a pair of legs splashing about in the sea. The rest of his body is already out of view and on its way to a watery grave. The real action in the scene is elsewhere: The foreground shows a farmer tilling his soil, a shepherd tending his flock, a fisherman working the coastline—all blithely unaware of and uninterested in Icarus' sinking fortunes. In Brueghel's landscape, the center of attention has shifted from the mythic to the mundane. As William Carlos Williams poetically described it, "There was/A splash quite unnoticed/This was/Icarus drowning."

Odd as it may seem, Brueghel's painting also provides a way of thinking about the 2000 election and one of its defining, though largely unmentioned, characteristics: the country's general and substantial lack of interest in who becomes our next president. These days, politicians—certainly Al Gore and George W. Bush—are seeming more and more like Icarus, while potential voters are acting more and more like Brueghel's farmers and shepherds.

Such disengagement is particularly strange since Campaign 2000 has so many markers of a momentous political occasion: The first national election not simply of a new century but of a new millennium; a two-term vice president of a popular though scandal-ridden administration squaring off against an "outsider" son of a former president; a statistical dead heat in what was shaping up as one of the tightest presidential contests since 1960; and slim majorities in both houses of Congress potentially up for grabs. If we couldn't care about *this* election, it seems safe to conclude that we won't care about any.

Yet as I write this just a few weeks before November 7, all indications are that Americans are not paying particular attention to the presidential race, even though neither Al Gore nor George Bush has been able to bust beyond the low-to-mid 40s in the polls for some time now.

Why don't we care more who becomes our president, not to mention our senators, our representatives, our dog catchers? More important, are voting-booth no-shows a problem? The folks at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government think so: They've created a "Vanishing Voter Project" to "invigorate the American electoral process." So does the crowd at Rock the Vote, who remind us that "Your vote is your voice" and that "If you don't vote, it's just like voting for the winner." (Sadly, if you vote for the loser, it's still just like voting for the winner.)

Though I always cast a ballot, I'm not quite ready to frown on nonvoters. In fact, those AWOL citizens may even have a lesson to teach those of us who spend much—if not most—of our time thinking about the government and our relationship to it. They remind us that there is a vibrant world apart from and beyond politics. That's something worth remembering, especially in a presidential election season.

To get a handle on our electoral apathy, consider the ratings tally for the first two presidential debates (the third had not yet taken place as of press time). As *The Dallas Morning News* aptly characterized it, the first debate, held October 3 in Boston, was a "borderline ratings bomb," drawing a paltry 46.6 million viewers. To put that figure in perspective, keep in mind that the first debate between Bill Clinton and Bob Dole in 1996 drew 46.1 million viewers—and that was in a race that was effectively over five minutes before Bob Dole announced his candidacy for the Republican nomination. Worse yet, compare this year's number to the October 13, 1984 debate between Ronald Reagan and Walter Mondale. Even though it came late in an election cycle in which the incumbent almost shut the challenger out in the Electoral College, the Reagan-Mondale debate drew 20 million more viewers than this year's.

The ratings for the second Gore-Bush debate predictably went even further south, plummeting about 20 percent from their first exchange. The vice presidential debate pulled an anemic 28.5 million viewers, the second-lowest total ever according to Nielsen (only the 1996 match-up between Al Gore and Jack Kemp did worse).

The decline in debate viewership is part of a 40-year trend, says Curtis Gans, the director of the Committee for the Study of the American Electorate, a nonprofit that tracks voter engagement and participation. Essentially, Gans told me in a phone interview, it's all been downhill since that first Nixon-Kennedy debate. (Viewed by almost 60 percent of American households with TVs, it remains by far the debate ratings champ.) Although there have been occasional upticks in viewership—the first debate among President Bush, Bill Clinton, and Ross Perot in 1992 provides the most recent example—the real question, Gans says, is not whether the 2000 debates would draw a small audience but just how low the electorate's interest will sink over time.

Gans is betting that the blasé attitudes underlying the debate numbers will translate into relatively few ballots cast in November. Even if there is a slight increase in voter turnout this time around, he argues persuasively that the long-term historical patterns unmistakably trend downward. Indeed, some political scientists contend that eligible voters have been casting fewer ballots since around 1900. (The effects of segregation in the South make it difficult to develop definitive figures prior to the voting rights acts of the 1960s.) Certainly, there is no argument that for at least the past 35 years voter turnout has gotten lower and lower in local, state, and federal

elections, even when candidates provide meaningful contrasts to each other. In 1968, for instance, 60.8 percent of the voting age population voted in the presidential election. In 1996, that figure stood at 49 percent. (As with the TV audience for the debates, there have been occasional reversals of the trend; for instance, 55 percent of eligible voters cast a ballot in 1992.)

The typical reading of these and other trends (such as the declining rate at which individuals identify strongly with either major party) is that they reflect the ways in which special interests and the "professionalization" of politics have squeezed the individual voter out of the democratic process. As Gans told *The Christian Science Monitor* earlier this year, "We have a crisis of the erosion of democracy at the grass roots." But I'm not convinced that the nation's manifest lack of interest in politics stems from such sources, or that it's a bad thing. After all, people in general look out for themselves pretty well, and would-be voters are relatively free individuals who choose to live their lives in ways that will rarely—if ever—comport with a political scientist's vision of the virtuous life.

Here's a different take: We participate less in politics for the same reason we stopped going to drive-in movies the way we used to, getting married as teenagers, making dinner at home, and, for men at least, wearing blue suits with white shirts and red ties: not because we *can't*, but because we don't want to. Our flesh is not weak when it comes to voting; it's just not willing.

The center of gravity in American life has shifted away from partisan politics and into other areas of activity in which individuals (and groups of individuals) have far greater hopes for gaining satisfaction. The big story in American life over the past few decades is not the decline in voter participation but the ever-increasing proliferation of options, of choices, and of identities in everyday life.

At virtually every level and in every way, there are both more options and, as important, acceptance of more options than there were 20 years ago, 30 years ago, 40 years ago—something clearly evident from indicators ranging from rising interracial marriage rates to increasing acceptance of alternative sexual orientations to increased access to higher education to telecommuting to relaxed dress codes in the workplace.

Aiding and abetting such developments is a consumer culture that by and large responds to customer demand by increasing hours, service, and product selection, whether we're talking about fast food, automobiles, or books. In a word, American life is increasingly characterized by *choice*. Which may also explain why people increasingly see politics as irrelevant to their lives: Politics remains fundamentally a realm of control, not choice.

The big story in American life over the past few decades is not the decline in voter participation but the ever-increasing proliferation of options, of choices, and of identities in everyday life.

For their part, politicians recognize that "choice," defined in the broadest terms possible, has emerged as the preeminent American value. Choice used to be limited to a few positions, such as abortion and school vouchers (which were often assumed to be mutually exclusive). The term is now ubiquitous in contemporary political discourse. Certainly both Al Gore and George W. Bush peppered their rhetoric with the word and characterized virtually all their policy proposals in terms of it.

Each candidate charged that the other's prescription drug benefit for Medicare didn't offer seniors a "real choice." Gore told us repeatedly that one of his tax-based spending plans will allow every family to choose whether to send their kids to college, while George W. Bush testified that young workers should have the right to choose to put some of the money the government forces them to withhold into a small number of "safe" investments.

Such political gestures toward choice are typically incomplete and often incoherent; certainly, they remain largely unconvincing to a wary public. Leaving aside issues of whose money is being spent in the first place, it's hard to believe that Al Gore's ultra-detailed "targeted tax cuts" won't simply embroil beneficiaries in all sorts of bureaucractic intrigue and micromanagement. Similarly, it's hard to believe that George W. Bush is really committed to letting you spend your money as you see fit (Think about that the next time you buy a nickel bag of pot.)

Given that context, it's appealing—even inspiring on some level—that many Americans are letting Icarus drown, so to speak, and simply ignoring politics. Rather than seeking permission or waiting for sanction from government, they are simply getting on with the business of living their lives. They're living on their time, not anyone else's.

To be sure, many of the developments that facilitate choice—from the birth control pill to always-open supermarkets to Microsoft Windows—end up entwined with politics in one way or another. As a number of stories elsewhere in this issue testify, specific policies can greatly help or harm the lives of millions. If government is only rarely involved in the early stages of technological and lifestyle innovation—it more typically works to retard such things—it's extremely adept at inserting itself into the process later on, often with negative effects.

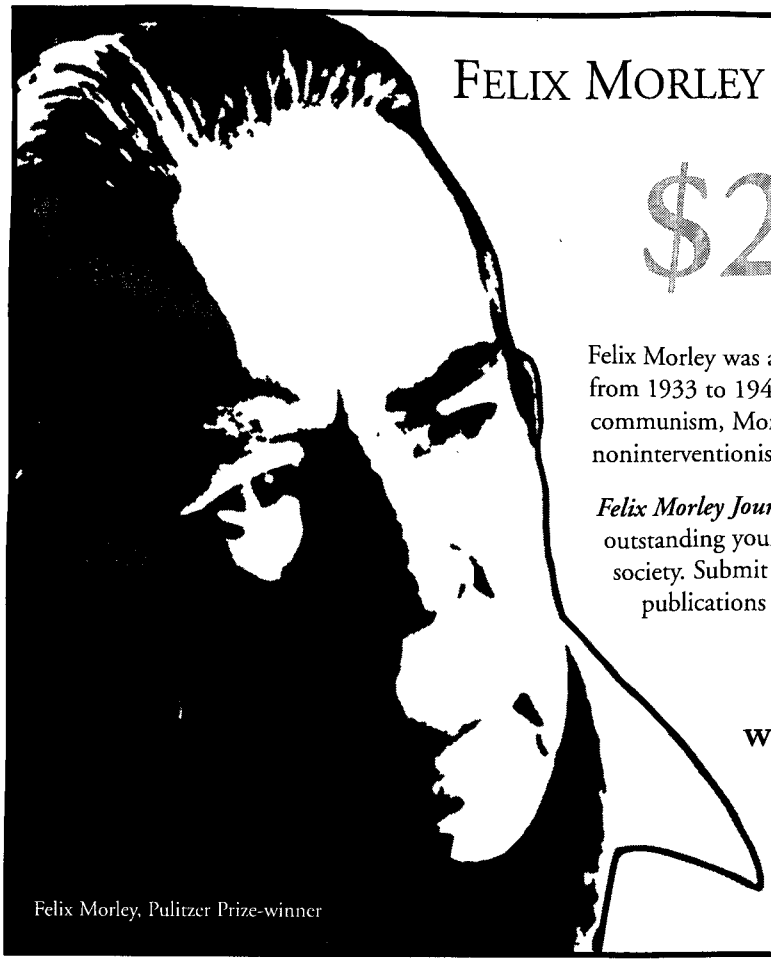
But it's equally clear that the engine driving choice and rising living standards in America runs on tracks that range far beyond politics. In that sense, it's worth remembering that the most important events on Election Day don't necessarily take place at the polls.

Nick Gillespie (gillespie@reason.com) is editor-in-chief of REASON.

Corrections

In "Without Merit" (October), the name of Andrew Rotherham, the director of the 21st Century Schools Project at the Progressive Policy Institute, was misspelled.

In "Trade Winds" (November), the name of Adrian Wooldridge, coauthor of *A Future Perfect*, was misspelled.



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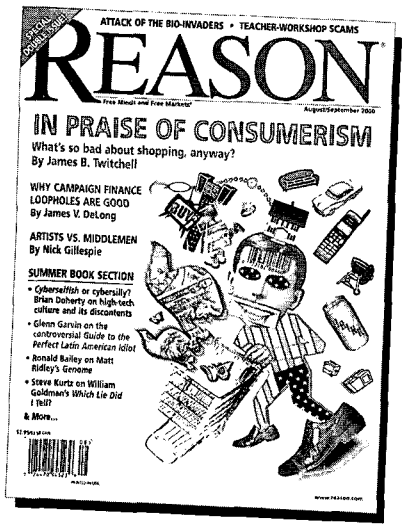
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August/September 2000
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• Ronald Bailey on Matt Ridley's Genome
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& More...

Bio Invaders

In "Bio Invaders" (August/September), Ronald Bailey writes that 99 percent of crop plants in the United States are nonnative. I understand that the following plants were found in North America when Europeans arrived: corn, tobacco, cranberries, chestnuts, tomatoes, sweet pepper, and some yams. (Some of these are from "tropical" and Central America.) These are pretty important crops!

Bailey adds that all of our livestock, except for the turkey, are nonnative. Since the turkey is a bird, albeit generally flightless, one would normally include other birds, such as ducks and geese, which could be found in most habitable places in the 15th century. Additionally, buffalo are once again considered livestock.

Isaiah W. Cox
London, England

Ronald Bailey's open borders for "bio invaders" reads like science fiction. In keeping with the tenor of oversimplification, even if we accept the inaccurate statement that 99 percent of crop plants are nonnative, the same can be said of measles, cholera, tuberculosis, and HIV.

According to the academics Bailey quoted, the latter qualify as species "enrichment," while rejection of them is mere "religious" preference. Put another way, the benefits of cattle do not lessen the damage wrought by leafy spurge and cheatgrass. Furthermore, to compare the introduction of nonnatives via a random piece of driftwood and via a cargo boat, tens of thousands of which ply the oceans daily, asks us to believe that the quantity of insults is insignificant. That's a bit like saying that having multiple sexual partners does not alter the probability of contracting sexually transmitted disease.

Sure, case-by-case analysis would be ideal. But this assumes we can reverse unsuccessful experiments. Sadly, our few and costly successes are thus far limited to human, rather than ecological, health.

John Walker
Coaldale, CO

Ronald Bailey replies: When I said 99 percent of crop plants were nonnative, I was thinking of the bulk of food production rather than toting up individual species. The ambiguity is certainly my fault. But even looking at individual crop species, 99 percent is not far off.

First, let's agree that crops and livestock are cultivated species, not wild ones, and that the relevant region is the continental United States. Within those parameters, native crops include sunflowers, Jerusalem artichokes, and arguably cranberries, though whether they were cultivated by Native Americans is an open question. Wild chestnuts were ubiquitous in the Appalachians, but the chestnuts eaten by Americans today are generally European or Chinese. As Mr. Cox correctly notes, many of the species cultivated by Native Americans were brought from Mexico, Central America, and South America, including tomatoes, peppers, corn, beans, squash, and even some varieties of tobacco. And North America had plenty of ducks and geese, but again the domestic varieties raised today come from the Old World. Interestingly, the domestic turkey and the tomato both were brought from Mexico to Europe where they were cultivated first before being introduced to North America.

The May 2000 *UNESCO Courier* lists 120 crops and livestock species and their regions of origin. Only four are native to North America. Not all 120 are raised in the United States, but the fact that 96.7 percent of them come from other regions gives a rough approximation of how dependent our agriculture is on nonnative species.

Like Mr. Walker, I do not like measles, cholera, tuberculosis, and HIV. I reject them not for "religious" reasons, but because they threaten human health. In strictly biological terms, however, they do indeed count as "enriching" the biodiversity of North America. By one estimate, 50,000 or so nonnative species now dwell in the United States, including honeybees, honeysuckle, apples, pears, peaches, nightcrawlers, bluegrass, alfalfa, and red clover. Most people are little bothered by their presence, and they have commingled with native species without much mischief. (Should modern American schoolchildren be taught to condemn Johnny Appleseed for heedlessly spreading invasive species?)

The point of my article is that the problem is not nonnative species per se but bad-acting nonnative species—ones that harm us economically or harm landscapes that we value for aesthetic reasons. Mr. Walker is right that increased trade among humans raises the likelihood of any given species making it to a new environment, but he misses my point that how a species arrives is immaterial—what it does in a new environment is what concerns us. I assume that Mr. Walker would favor controlling an economically damaging nonnative species even if it arrived "naturally" on a piece of driftwood.

"Ecological health" is a notoriously slippery concept. How does one measure it? Maximum productivity? Maximum number of species? Greatest stability over time? Is a tropical forest healthier than a desert, a deciduous forest more robust than a pine barrens, a virgin prairie more vigorous than a wheat farm? My point remains that a preference for native species is not a scientific issue but an aesthetic one.

Free Money

James V. DeLong's fine review of campaign finance issues ("Free Money," August/September) is marred by including a

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Circulation Service
P.O. Box 526, Mt. Morris, IL 61054
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page from the Republican Party playbook: that we mollify advocates of contribution limits by conceding a new requirement for "full and immediate disclosure over the Internet."

DeLong notes constitutional objections "since anonymity is sometimes important." (There are objections even when anonymity is not important; you have rights even when you don't "need" them.) He addresses them by saying, first, that disclosure is useful to voters. Yes, and to commercial and partisan pitchmen, to politicians assembling dossiers on citizens, and to future adversaries seeking to play guilt by association. If free speech is a right, it cannot depend on a duty of disclosure.

DeLong's other two responses are essentially that this new duty is the price we have to pay to regain part of our liberty. If the GOP cannot advocate one liberty without abandoning another, it is not clear that REASON has to help out.

Moreover, if we are discussing political strategy, we ought to consider whether, after we substitute a mild restriction for a harsh one, the harsh restriction will return, for the same reason it was originally enacted, and we will ultimately be stuck with both. Namely, campaign finance limits will be proposed again following any repeal and will again have irresistible class warfare appeal, whereas it will be impossible to eliminate the Internet disclosure requirement.

DeLong made a great and principled case for absolute liberty; he should have left Faustian bargains to the bumblers in Congress.

Spike
Brentwood, NH

James DeLong replies: I confess to considerable dithering over the disclosure problem, largely for the reasons that Spike states so cogently. Also for a reason he does not mention: There is a real risk of retaliation by incumbents against those who donate to opponents. The "aren't they cute" gloss the press often puts on the maneuverings of politicians obscures the true ruthlessness with which the game is played.

But I still come down on the side of disclosure, as applied to contributions to the candidates. To some extent this is indeed a Faustian bargain—the atmosphere has been so poisoned by demagoguery and nonsense that a price in purity must be paid if the present system is to be destroyed. I'm desperate enough to destroy it that I think the *price* worth paying.

Also, there is a safety valve for anonymity. Disclosure should apply only to contributions to the candidates and political parties. If attaining reform required that they be extended to direct advocacy I would even agree to that, as long as the term is defined narrowly. Disclosure requirements should not and could not realistically be applied to issue ads.

At a panel discussion of these issues, Ed Crane, president of the Cato Institute, argued that disclosure should be governed by the people. If they regard the source of a candidate's funds as important, they will demand to know and will penalize those who refuse to answer. If voters do not regard this as important information, then so be it.

I take it Spike would agree with this position, and, really, I would agree that it represents the promised land. But as Virginia Postrel pointed out in these pages a few months ago ("Impure Thoughts," August/September), insisting on the best can kill efforts to obtain the better. On the campaign finance issue, for now I would settle for the better, or at least for forestalling the destructive forces that would make things still worse.

Utopian Crackpots

I can appreciate Tom Peyser's debunking of most utopian planners, Edward Bel-

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lamy in particular ("Looking Back at *Looking Backward*," August/September). However, I take issue with his aside that implied Henry George was a crackpot.

George was nothing of the sort. He was well versed in the writings of the major classical economists and accepted the principle of a free market economy. His proposal to tax land rent was a means—the only means—to finance government and secure a more equal division of the economic benefits resulting from gifts of nature or the growth of the community. Libertarians may differ with his philosophy, but that does not make him a certifiable nut.

I was quite surprised by Peyser's omission of a Bellamy legacy that is arguably even more pervasive than that of the cult of planning. Bellamy was the major proponent of the daily recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. This remains a compulsory ritual in most public schools.

Wayne Luney
Sacramento, CA

Questioning Consumerism

While I appreciate our current bounty, I'm not sure I want to live in James Twitchell's America ("In Praise of Consumerism," August/September), a place he would have consumed by consumption. As our choices in cereal and cell phones have increased, our interest in anything of lasting value has decreased.

Many Americans may agree that "getting and spending have been the most passionate...endeavors of modern life." That's just the problem. What happened to personal achievement and growth through learning, leading, or building in business, the arts, education, or one's own family?

Americans have confused broad choices in consumer goods with virtue and personal liberty. Our kids believe having a cell phone and a car confers adulthood and freedom. Political campaigns are packaged marketing messages that feed on our shallow desires for a knight on a white horse, cleansing our public spaces of any real social or political problem while leaving a springtime-fresh scent to cover their lies and personal follies.

Americans should be more reflective about how we spend our wealth, rather than just contemplating whether to add leather seats to the new SUV. What does all this consumerism for the middle and upper classes gain our country when 50 percent of the kids in metropolitan school districts cannot read or write?

America's commerce should be exported but not its consumerism. Maybe other countries are resisting our consumerism because they want a culture based on something more.

Dale Stange
Folsom, CA

Workshop Nightmares

Jerry Jesness' adventures in "Workshop Wonderland" (August/September) replay a nightmare for intelligent teachers who have had to undergo the obligatory reindoctrination known as "professional development."

One of the unsavory features of monopoly education is that the same set of teacher trainers makes the workshop circuit, scarfing up taxpayer dollars and dispensing nostrums as though they were tested ideas for immediate classroom application.

Workshops tend to the cutesy. Everything from "authentic assessment" to "multiple intelligences" is fodder for captive teachers, while rarely are there workshops on how to teach the fine points of grammar or U.S. history.

Were education a competitive industry, the workshop circuit would offer more substantive fare because consumers—and teachers—would be in a position to demand it.

Robert Holland
Lexington Institute
Arlington, VA

REASON NEWS

- With this issue, we welcome Alan Charles Kors as a contributing editor.
- Walter Olson's column is on hiatus as he completes a book manuscript and will return shortly.
- REASON subscribers will receive an end-of-the-year letter requesting financial support. We depend on readers' contributions to continue and expand our activities. Please give generously.

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(Required by 39 USC 3685)

Publication Title: Reason
Publication Number: 0048-6906
Filing Date: 9/28/00
Issue Frequency: monthly, except combined Aug/Sept
Number of Issues Published Annually: 11
Annual Subscription Price: $19.98
Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication: 3415 S. Sepulveda Blvd., Suite 400, Los Angeles, Los Angeles Cty, CA 90034-6064
Complete Mailing Address of Headquarters or General Business Office of Publisher: 3415 S. Sepulveda Blvd., Suite 400, Los Angeles, CA 90034
Full Names and Complete Mailing Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor: Publisher: Mike Alissi, 3415 S. Sepulveda Blvd., Suite 400, Los Angeles, CA 90034. Editor: Nick Gillespie, 3415 S. Sepulveda Blvd., Suite 400, Los Angeles, CA 90034. Managing Editor: Jesse Walker, 3415 S. Sepulveda Blvd., Suite 400, Los Angeles, CA 90034.
Owner: Reason Foundation (non-profit org.), 3415 S. Sepulveda Blvd., Suite 400, Los Angeles, CA 90034
Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages, or Other Securities: None
Issue Date for Circulation Data Below: November 2000

Extent and Nature of Circulation	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
Total No. Copies	64,917	61,353
Paid And/Or Requested Circulation		
Paid/Requested outside-county mail subscriptions stated on form 3541	51,963	49,115
Paid in-county subscriptions stated on form 3541	0	0
Sales though dealers and carriers, street vendors, counter sales, and other non-USPS paid distribution	7,478	7,300
Total Paid And/Or Requested Circulation	59,441	56,415
Free Distribution by Mail (Samples, complimentary, and other free)		
Outside-county as stated on form 3541	1,706	1,239
In-county as stated on form 3541	0	0
Other classes mailed through the USPS	0	0
Free Distribution Outside the Mail (Carriers or other means)	0	0
Total Free Distribution	1,706	1,239
Total Distribution	61,147	57,654
Copies Not Distributed	3,769	3,699
Total	64,917	61,353
Percent Paid And/Or Requested Circulation	97%	98%

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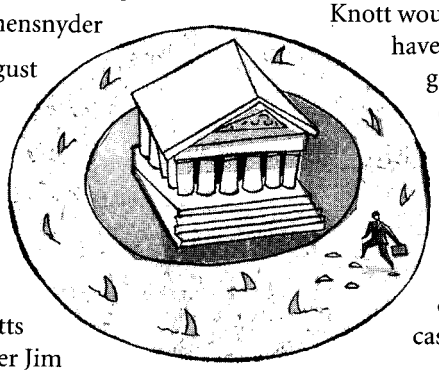
Mike Alissi, Publisher

Viridian Vexation

By Sara Rimensnyder



On August 1, a U.S. District Court ordered the federal government to cut Massachusetts factory owner Jim Knott a $68,000 check—payback for the money he spent during his four-year legal tangle with the Environmental Protection Agency. Knott was entitled to the award under the Hyde Amendment, a three-year-old law allowing defendants found innocent of federal criminal charges to seek reimbursement of legal fees. To win, they've got to prove the government's case against them was "frivolous, vexatious, or in bad faith."

Not too difficult in Knott's case. In 1997, more than a dozen EPA agents armed with semiautomatic weapons stormed into his wire mesh plant in Orthbridge, acting on an anonymous tip that he was violating the Clean Water Act by sending highly acidic wastewater through the sewage system. He was indicted on that charge—until a federal prosecutor admitted that officials had concealed evidence that would have exonerated him. While preparing to seek Hyde compensation, Knott found evidence suggesting that agents not only concealed data but falsified pH tests in order to incriminate him.

Almost as troubling as the agency's guile is the fact that it didn't simply file a civil complaint against Knott; it wanted to throw him into the slammer. Of course, if it had taken the less severe route, Knott wouldn't have been eligible for a dime: The Hyde Amendment applies only to criminal cases.

Pulling the Tap

By Michael W. Lynch

The government's war on a good time has opened a new front in Ohio, where the state Liquor Control Commission decreed that as of August 9, 2000, persons planning to throw a party requiring five or more kegs of beer must register with the state five days in advance. To get permission to purchase the kegs, they have to disclose the party's address and grant a general right of entry to police, making a mockery of the Fourth Amendment's protection against unreasonable search and seizure.

Julie Ehrhart, spokesperson for the Ohio Department of Public Safety, which requested the law, says the new regulations were needed because under the old rules it was up to the beer distributors to decide how many kegs to sell. What problem does this solve? "It's a proactive approach, not a reactive approach," she explains. "We'll know about parties that will be having multi-kegs. It'll give us a heads up. That is important because we need to monitor the liquor laws."

One would expect an outcry on campus. Yet Shane McClintock, a 21-year-old senior at Ohio University, is surprisingly blasé. "In theory, it's a good law," he says. Part of his nonchalance no doubt stems from the fact that kegs are already prohibited at the eight or so bashes a month that his fraternity, Delta Upsilon, helps throw. And it'll be easy to evade the rule by simply breaking up orders into four-keg allotments.

But like the Ohio chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, which may challenge the law, McClintock draws the line at rolling out the red carpet for the cops. "They come into your house, and there could be a slew of things going on," he says. "People could be doing drugs, theoretically. Someone could get into a fight, and if the cops are there they could get arrested for assault."

Yes, there certainly is a downside to having cops hanging around.

Balance Sheet

By Jeff A. Taylor

ASSETS

▲ **Rich and Richer.** The number of U.S. millionaires grows at 16 percent each year, according to Spectrem Group. Last year 7.2 million people topped the seven-figure mark in liquid assets, up from 3.4 million five years before. Meanwhile, the number worth over $5 million grew at a 46 percent annual clip.

▲ **Radio Free Harare.** Two days after a police raid, Zimbabwe's first private radio station was back on the air, thanks to a ruling by the country's top court. An earlier ruling had overturned the state-owned Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation's monopoly over the airwaves. Capitol Radio then went on the air.

▲ **The Gauntlet.** A San Jose federal jury finds that Clint Eastwood did not violate the Americans With Disabilities Act by refusing to make modifications to his Carmel, California, hotel. A woman with muscular dystrophy sued Eastwood in 1996, claiming his property did not comply with the law. Eastwood refused a settlement offer and went to trial rather than pay $500,000 in legal fees to the plaintiff.

▲ **Fueling Around.** Europeans revolt against high fuel taxes. In the U.K., site of shutdown and gridlock, drivers pay the equivalent of $3.46 per gallon in taxes. The U.S. is spared as only truckers protest still-high U.S. levies.

▲ **Going Dutch.** The Netherlands lifts an 88-year-old ban on brothels, which had been tolerated in the country but were still illegal. Prostitution itself was already legal. The new law means, however, that the brothel owners will have to pay taxes and obey work rules.

▲ **Sunshine State.** A Florida appeals court resuscitates the state's school voucher program. The panel overturns a March decision by declaring that vouchers do not violate the state constitution. Opponents of the plan will appeal.

Torture Bearers

By Brian Doherty

Last spring the United Nations accused the United States of violating provisions

▼ **Low Blow.** The German Cartel Office orders Wal-Mart and two German rivals to raise prices because other stores may not be able to match them. Loss leaders are verboten in the heavily regulated world of German retailing.

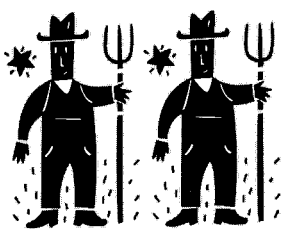
▼ **COPPA Plea.** The Children's Online Privacy Protection Act kicks in and Web sites respond by going out—of business. Sites remove content intended for young children rather than spend thousands complying with COPPA's rules, which include written permission from parents for some features.

▼ **Alternative Lifestyles.** The alternative minimum tax goes unreformed, despite bipartisan support for change. The unindexed levy will catch millions of taxpayers next year, even though it was designed for the super-wealthy and not middle-class families with lots of deductions.

▼ **Filter Clog.** Sherrill Babcock is forced to register with BlackPlanet.com as Babpenis and Babdildo because her last name wouldn't pass censorware. The Web site operator says, Sorry, but the filters have to stay to keep the site "civil."

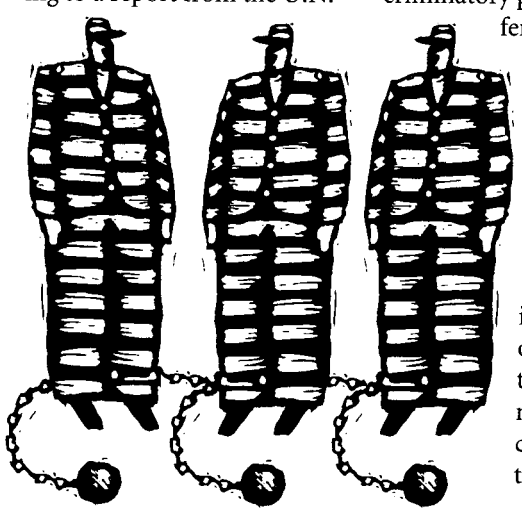
▼ **In Dock.** The U.S. Navy delays a multibillion-dollar computer outsourcing contract after Congress complains. The holdup has all the earmarks of politicians trying to steer the contract to a favored source. It is expected to be worth between $6 billion and $12 billion during the next five to eight years.

▼ **Drug Kingpins.** A 74-year-old Wisconsin farmer and his 80-year-old brother are charged with running a marijuana farm after pot worth $598,000 is seized. David and Eugene Burmesch could each face up to 30 years in prison. David said he grew the pot because he needed money to support a disabled son and had done so for the past 20 to 25 years.



LIABILITIES

of the U.N. Convention Against Torture, which the U.S. ratified in 1994. According to a report from the U.N. Committee Against Torture, American police and prison guards have a record of discriminatory prisoner abuse, female prisoners are often raped by prison personnel, and public chain gangs are still in use. The committee is demanding, among other things, that torture be made a federal crime, that electroshock stun belts be banned, and that juveniles not be held in prisons with adult populations.



Amnesty International filed its own 45-page report to the committee, detailing specific actions by U.S. police officials. The abuses included the shocking of a California prisoner by a 50,000-volt stun gun for eight seconds in open court at a judge's order; widespread shackling of children in a South Dakota juvenile detention center; the death of a Texas inmate after he was pepper-sprayed while tied in a restraining chair; and the use of pepper spray swabbed directly into the eyes of anti-logging and anti–World Trade Organization protesters in the Pacific Northwest.

All signatories of the convention were supposed to file reports on torture in their countries. The U.S. report was officially due in 1996 but was delivered only this year. A State Department spokesman says the United States will take the U.N. committee's recommendations under consideration, but stresses that "Article II of the convention leaves it up to signatory state parties to decide how to comply with its promise to eliminate torture." For example, the U.S. insists it can rely on its own "cruel and unusual punishment" standard under American constitutional law, although many foreign governments argue that capital punishment, legal here, is covered by the convention's ban on "torture" and "cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment."

The Coders' Code

By Jeff A. Taylor

In September, the button-down corporate world ▶

QUOTES

"Because mind and body are intricately connected, **psychoactive substances should be banned from chess tournaments** as they are from basketball, weight lifting, and other events played singly or in teams."
—Drug czar Barry McCaffrey, in the September issue of *Chess Life*. McCaffrey urged U.S. chess tourneys to follow Spain's lead and make participants submit to urine tests that would detect, among other things, "performance-enhancing steroids."

"There is another sort of violence that befell our misfortunate people—external violence spearheaded by power-wielders in Washington and Brussels. The forms of the external violence are the long-standing sanctions, last year's bombs, and support to Albanian terrorists in Kosovo. **Whatever the source, violence is always violence, despite occasional attempts at presenting it as humane.**"
—Vojislav Kostunica, victor over Slobodan Milosevic in the Yugoslavian presidential race, at an April 14, 2000, Belgrade rally, quoted in the October 9 *Progressive Review*

SOURCE

Want to know why the White House's Web site for kids violates the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act? Go to **www.privacilla.org** for a discussion of privacy issues from a free market perspective.

BRICKBATS

◆ In Arizona, Republican state Sen. John Huppenthal, who once helped pass a law banning automated telemarketing calls, just spent an entire day apologizing to voters. By his own count, more than 3,000 citizens got an automated call sometime between 1 and 3:30 a.m. one Monday making a political pitch for Huppenthal.

◆ The first time Stanley Burnside got a notice of an unpaid parking ticket for his old truck, he was confused. After all, the truck had been parked behind his barn for more than two years since the transmission blew out. Even more confusing was the source of the ticket: New York City, a place where the Nebraska man has never even been. But when the tickets kept coming, and New York threatened to report him to a credit bureau, he became alarmed. After hiring an attorney, Burnside finally convinced the city it had made a mistake.

◆ Mexican prison warden Raul Zarate died when he tripped through a skylight and fell to his death. He had been spying on a couple enjoying a conjugal visit.

◆ Los Angeles officials are taking stock of a 10-year-old law requiring developers to erect public art in their buildings or pay a tax of 1 percent of the cost of the development. Among the art erected because of the law: a giant fiberglass snake, a sculpted Home Depot sign, and a painting of Earvin "Magic" Johnson in the lobby of his movie theater.

got a lesson in hacker ethics.

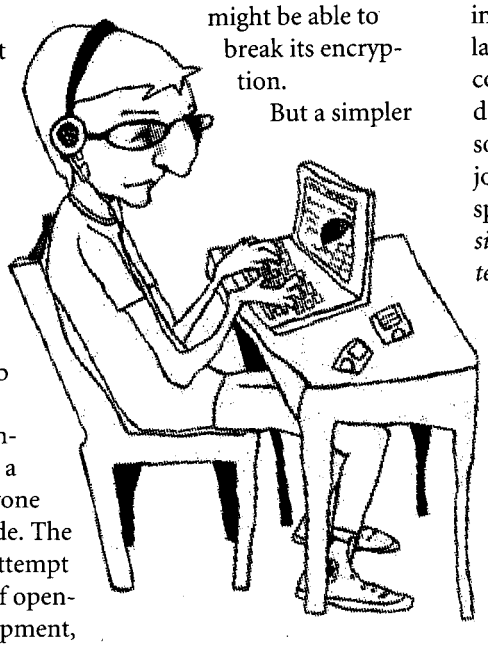
The music industry has been flogging something called the Secure Digital Music Initiative as a response to unencrypted CDs and a polyglot of online music formats. SDMI is supposed to deliver music that can't be turned into a million free MP3 files. At least that's the theory. In reality, the standard has been slow in coming and may not protect music any better than encrypted DVDs protected movies.

Enter the SDMI Web site hacksdmi.org. It posted several SDMI-encoded files and offered a prize of $10,000 to anyone who could bust the code. The contest was a clumsy attempt to harness the power of open-source software development, in which informal bodies of coders attack a common problem. SDMI Executive Director Leonardo Chiariglione called it a chance for hackers "to shape the future of digital music."

Hackers—programmers, really—didn't see it that way. Soon calls for a boycott of the SDMI challenge proliferated across the Net.

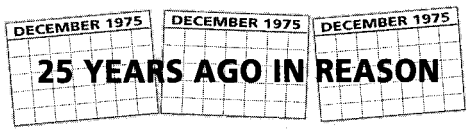
Open-source software maven Eric Raymond denounced the SDMI effort, noting that a good SDMI would be bad for those who believe in the free flow of information. The Electronic Frontier Foundation, which supports civil liberties in cyberspace, also called for coders to boycott the contest, noting that SDMI "has indicated an interest in severely limiting your ability to listen to digital recordings in your favorite format and in undermining all attempts at non-SDMI-compliant music distribution models."

The response was so negative that SDMI had to have seen it coming. That, in turn, set some programmers to speculating that what the music industry was really after was a list of people who might be able to break its encryption.



But a simpler explanation is at hand. The hack-a-format contest was never intended to make an impression on the wired world. Its real target was the ground which has proven quite fertile for the music industry: the courts, the regulators, and Congress. The contest was a cheap way to demonstrate just how unreasonable those strident bit jockeys really are. Expect this spin: *Our attempts at inclusiveness were met with a hysterical boycott!*

Of course, the Electronic Frontier Foundation actually attempted to be part of the formal SDMI process from the beginning, so as to steer it away from a massive expansion of copyright protections. But that didn't fit the music industry's game plan.



☛ "While it is largely agreed that there is a crucial need to defend the freedom of business in order to avoid *additional* regulations, the fact that free enterprise has already been crippled by government intervention is ignored....Many business spokesmen seem to believe that the existing system of interventions represents free enterprise, whereas any new regulations would be socialistic."
—Charles G. Koch, "Anti-Capitalism & Business"

☛ "Topless dancing is protected by the First Amendment's guarantee of freedom of expression, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 2nd Circuit has ruled."
—"Milestones"

☛ "Many gurus flit about the land today predicting a monetary armageddon while urging the necessity for squirreling away gold and oatmeal in order to survive. The assumption is that those who do not have these materials will either break out in red-eyed rioting rage and burn down the countryside, or sit quietly on curbstones and die. The early months of 1933 are the only laboratory we have to observe what people actually *did* under such stress....The fact is that an enormous volume of business was transacted without any banks or money at all."
—James J. Martin, "Business & the New Deal"

Operation Juan Valdez

By Jeff A. Taylor

Backers of the Clinton administration's Plan Colombia, a $1.3 billion aid package loaded with military hardware and personnel, say it is unfair to draw parallels between this U.S involvement in a jungle civil war and America's experience in Southeast Asia.

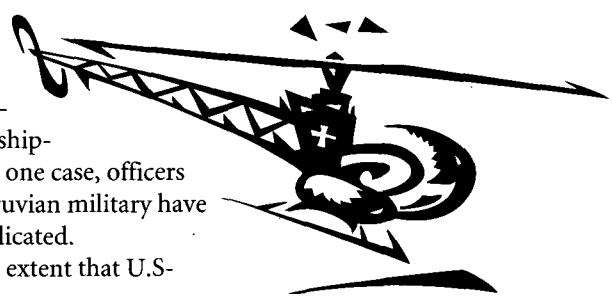
OK, it's a deal. Bang. Vietnam? Never heard of it.

So let's compare Plan Colombia with a much more recent—ongoing even—experience: the Balkans.

Colombia's neighbors have already worried that increased U.S. involvement in fighting "narco-traffickers" will mean trouble on their side of remote, rugged borders. Pish-posh, the State Department snorts. You have nothing to fear from any spillover.

Yet it was fear of destabilizing Europe that—once the false claims of genocide were exposed—stood as the main justification for NATO's military campaign in Serbia and the quite possibly permanent "nation building" presences in other parts of the former Yugoslavia. No one claimed that the various Balkan ethnic militias would actually invade a neighboring country—just that the ongoing fighting would send refugees to places that really, really didn't want refugees.

Compare that with Colombia, where there have already been reports of cross-border arms shipments. In one case, officers of the Peruvian military have been implicated.



To the extent that U.S-Colombian efforts succeed in turning up the heat on the narcos, the leftist guerillas, or both—we will assume for the moment that it is possible to distinguish between the two groups—that will mean a quick slip across a border to sanctuary. The entire history of warfare tells us that is what happens.

But the Clinton administration insists that the fighting won't spill over, and that even if it does, it's no big deal. That puts the Clinton team in the position of arguing that the poor, fragile democracies of Latin America are better equipped to handle external threats than the rich, robust democracies of Europe. And that gun-toting fighters are less of a threat than suitcase-toting refugees.

In the unlikely event that the architects of Plan Colombia actually believe that, we should all be very afraid. More likely, it is merely garden-variety political malfeasance at work—and simple sadness will suffice.

DATA

Adult Programming

By Nick Gillespie

When the Federal Trade Commission released its much-ballyhooed report on "marketing violent entertainment to children" in September, politicians and pundits said it proved that the entertainment industry foisted a "culture of carnage" on unwitting parents and impressionable children. Buried in an appendix to the report, however, were the results of an FTC-commissioned survey of about 760 parents nationwide. The main finding? The vast majority of "parents report substantial involvement in the selection and purchase of movies, games, and music."

PARENTS' RESPONSES TO FTC SURVEY

	An adult	An adult and child together	The child
MOVIES			
Who selects the product?	21%	78%	2%
Who purchases the product?	60%	36%	3%
Parent restricts child's use of product: 90%			
MUSIC			
Who selects the product?	11%	55%	34%
Who purchases the product?	34%	37%	28%
Parent restricts child's use of product: 72%			
GAMES			
Who selects the product?	17%	53%	29%
Who purchases the product?	38%	45%	15%
Parent restricts child's use of product: 68%			

Source: Federal Trade Commission. Figures are rounded to nearest whole number.

Disarming Harriet Tubman

By Sara Rimensnyder

Public parks across America are littered with larger-than-life statues of war heroes, most of them carrying guns. Nevertheless, some people in Baltimore are up in arms over muralist Michael Alewitz's plans to depict Underground Rail- ▶

BRICKBATS

◆ In Williamstown, Vermont, the school system is pressed for educators. So Bill Corrow, a former teacher, volunteered to teach a history course at the local high school. His classes quickly became popular with students and parents. Then English teacher Kevin Lawrence filed a complaint, charging that Corrow was violating union rules by teaching for free and by not being certified to teach history. The union has taken up the grievance, and Corrow may lose his job.

◆ In Fort Worth, Texas, guidance counselor Seth Shaw was suspended for making an offensive remark to another school district employee. The woman had dropped by Shaw's school to set up some sexual harassment workshops. He allegedly greeted her by saying, "Hello, good looking."

◆ The Canadian Broadcasting Corp. has banned a commercial for a firm's line of weather insurance. The ad featured a huckster dressed in an Indian headdress leading a group of senior citizens in a rain dance. The state broadcast company felt the ad affronted both Indians and the elderly.

◆ In Florida, it took only three appeals to the bar for the law firm of Wasserman & Walters to win the right to use the term "Webmasters" in their ads. It seems the bar thought the term was "self-laudatory," which is forbidden. They didn't realize the term referred to the firm's potential client base.

—Charles Oliver

road conductor Harriet "Moses" Tubman parting a swirling Red Sea with a rifle. The scene would be one of a series of murals called *The Dreams of Harriet Tubman.*

The Associated Black Charities of Baltimore, which had initially offered to display the mural on its downtown building, flat-out rejected sketches of a gunslinging Tubman (viewable above and in color at www.baltimoreclayworks.org/community_projects.htm). According to the group, the image could be viewed as racist or pro-violence and would be inappropriate in a city that witnesses 300 murders a year. Board members asked Alewitz to replace the rifle with a staff. When he refused, they told him to find another wall.

Alewitz is particularly rankled by the charge that his mural could promote gun violence. "When people refer to gun violence, what they're really talking about is violence—anti-social violence—by African-American or Latino people," he says. "In fact, most gun violence is conducted by the U.S. government. The two leading contenders for president celebrate the violence of the death penalty, and the embargoes of countries like Iraq and Cuba that have resulted in thousands of needless deaths. It is the height of hypocrisy to point at 300 homicides in Baltimore and then say, 'This is the cause of violence.'"

Alewitz adds that Tubman used her weapon as an instrument of liberation, to end the violence of slavery—"an appropriate example for young people today." Tubman was certainly one fierce lady, by any day's standards. She had to be to lead approximately 300 slaves to freedom—rifle in one hand, lantern in the other—and then join the Civil War as a guerrilla fighter.

Alewitz and the Baltimore Clayworks, the art center that commissioned the work, feel confident they'll find a prominent location for the mural, and the artist plans to be painting it by next summer.

Post No Petitions

By Brian Doherty

Since 1998, the U.S. Postal Service has banned collecting signatures for "petitions, polls, or surveys" on its property, with violators subject to a $50 fine and up to 30 days in jail. Twenty-five plaintiffs are now challenging this policy in the U.S. District Court for Washington, D.C., arguing that it violates their First Amendment rights to assemble peaceably and petition the government for a redress of grievances.

On its face, the prohibition is overly restrictive. The postal service argues the ban is merely a way of avoiding disturbances on its property, but the policy outlaws even the most peaceful and nondisruptive petitioning. The ban isn't content-neutral either, since voter registration drives are explicitly allowed under the new regulations.

While postal spokespeople have refused to comment on the ongoing litigation, the service's motion for summary judgment argues that its operation is more a business than a government entity, a popular postal service trope when it's faced with angry citizens. The plaintiffs say that's nonsense, quoting in their suit the U.S. Code's definition of the post office as "a basic and fundamental service provided to the people by the Government of the United States, authorized by the Constitution, created by Act of Congress." All the Bugs Bunny collectible stamps in the world won't change the postal service's status as a branch of government subject to First Amendment requirements, they argue, and neither will the lack of direct congressional appropriations to support postal operations.

The plaintiffs also note that they filed a Freedom of Information Act request to find out the reasoning behind the postal service's abrupt change of policy in 1998. (Until then, post offices had been traditional petitioning spots.) The documents they received "contain absolutely no findings or information regarding any disruptions of postal business caused by signature gathering activities."

Video Surveillance

By Charles Paul Freund

Last June, a dozen Cuban cops burst into the Havana home of one Cecilia Caballero Menendez, looking for a cache of dangerous contraband. According to the neighbors, Fidel's finest weren't looking for weapons, explosives, or even a hidden printing press. They were looking for videotapes that Caballero Menendez might have been renting to people bored witless by Castro's treatment of the Elian Gonzalez case.

Cops throughout Cuba have been scouring the island for such private video hoards throughout the Gonzalez melodrama. During the months that the boy was in the United States, Castro filled the Cuban airwaves with a barrage of talk shows and other programming demanding his return. After the boy was sent back by Janet Reno, Castro maintained his anti-American media momentum, programming hour after hour of shows demanding, for example, that the longstanding U.S. trade embargo be lifted.

The result: an explosion of private video rentals, as Cubans desperately sought something else to watch. Entrepreneurial citizens have started renting whatever tapes they have been able to accumulate to their neighbors, charging 10 pesos (about 40 cents) or less per tape. One such operator told a reporter for a Spanish-language paper in Miami that his customers included officials from Cuba's army and the Ministry of the Interior.

Although Cuba criminalizes any form of self-employment not specifically recognized by the state, an estimated 100 or so such private rental sources are flourishing in Havana. The better-stocked locations offer up to 6,000 titles. Some even deliver. (Cuba has "official," state-controlled video stores, too, but they charge far higher rates and cater to well-connected party members and foreigners.) Interestingly, the private operators offer more than feature films. Also available are shows taped off Miami broadcasts, including compilations of TV news.

In this case of Caballero Menendez, police told her neighbors they were looking for videos dealing with—of all subjects—Elian Gonzalez, suggesting a niche audience for direct counter-programming of Castro's major prime-time show. In this case, however, police were unable to find any tapes.

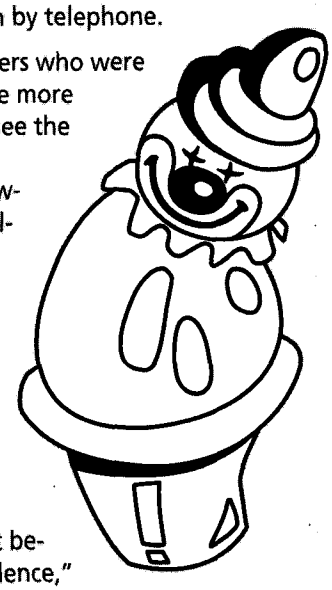
SOUNDBITE

Phantom Studies

By Jacob Sullum

"The verdict on violent entertainment is now in," Sen. Sam Brownback (R-Kan.) declared during the most recent moral panic involving kids and popular culture. "Violent entertainment is a public health hazard." To back up that claim, Brownback touted a joint statement from the American Medical Association, the American Psychological Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (available online at www.senate.gov/~brownback/violence1.pdf). "Well over 1,000 studies," it said, "point overwhelmingly to a causal connection between media violence and aggressive behavior in some children."

That sounds pretty impressive, except for one thing: It's not true. Jonathan Freedman, a University of Toronto psychologist who recently completed a review of the scientific literature, counts about 200 published studies that have tried to measure the impact of TV or film violence on aggression. What's more, he says, "The majority of studies do not find evidence that supports the notion that television violence causes aggression." Senior Editor Jacob Sullum spoke with Freedman by telephone.



Q: One of the classic studies in this area found that preschoolers who were shown a film of a man attacking an inflatable clown doll were more likely to knock the toy around than preschoolers who didn't see the film. What are the problems with that sort of research?

A: The situation is very subject to "demand factors." The showing of the violent film, which is usually a very short excerpt, almost inevitably carries a message that this is expected or allowed or wanted. It's very, very artificial research. When you get effects, it's easy to explain in other terms. Another big weakness is that very few of [the studies] make any effort to equate the violent and nonviolent films in terms of activity level, arousal, or interest. More arousal produces more of whatever it is you're measuring, which could include aggression.

Q: What about studies in more realistic settings?

A: The field experiments show almost nothing....The contrast between the way it's described, in terms of "overwhelming evidence," and the reality is just remarkable. It's not that 60 percent of them get good results and 40 percent of them don't—which would be pretty iffy from a scientific point of view but at least substantial. It's more like 25 percent get supportive results, and 75 percent either get nothing or get mixed results.

Q: If the evidence is as inconclusive as you say, why do we keep seeing these authoritative-seeming statements to the contrary?

A: I think it's purely political. This most recent statement was elicited by Brownback. [The organizations] had issued similar statements before, separately, that were equally inaccurate. "Thousands of studies" is a joke. It's sort of like the McCarthy era: "I have here a list of Communists...." You just know that no one looked at the research when they said that, because if they had they would know there aren't 1,000 studies.

Stump Speeches

In which our man in Washington sees Dick Cheney check into an old folks' home, watches Bush and Gore debate via proxies, and meets good-looking Libertarians with full sets of teeth.

By Michael W. Lynch

Subj: Cheney at the Old Folks' Home
Date: 9/8/2000
From: mwlynch@reason.com

It wasn't exactly exciting today when vice-presidential hopeful Dick Cheney addressed a crowd at Wesley Village, a residential community for the over-65 crowd in Shelton, Connecticut. Cheney started off on the wrong foot, showing up late. For all sorts of reasons, you don't want to keep the elderly waiting. He's not a dynamic speaker, either. In fact, he's so mellow that I thought he was tailing off into sleep in the auditorium's hot, stale air.

Gore, intoned Cheney in a hypnotic murmur, would put a bureaucrat in charge of health care and wouldn't implement his plan for years to come, while Bush's plan would provide people with immediate choice and relief. For proof, Cheney pointed to 103-year-old Effe Hobby, who has now apparently shaken the hands of vice-presidential candidates in both 1900 and 2000. Last year she spent $624 on prescription drugs. If Bush is elected and delivers on his promise, Cheney explained, she'll spend nothing at all. The implicit message, soft-pedaled by Cheney, was that if Gore is elected, Effe will be six feet under long before her benefits kick in.

Cheney didn't commit any gaffes, but he got a decidedly tepid response. The first, second, and almost only lines to garner applause from this hand-picked group were his promises that every senior would be entitled to the current set of Medicare benefits for the rest of their lives and that any changes to the program would include prescription drug coverage. Supporters were a bit chagrined at the brevity of Cheney's 16-minute speech; he compounded the disappointment by running out without taking questions.

"Some of us are getting feeble-minded," said John R. Turner, a retired DuPont employee, who told me he was going to vote for Bush-Cheney. "We don't really understand our options." He wanted to ask Cheney about who's going to advise seniors on their new options. Turner isn't even sure if he has drug coverage. "I suppose," he said when I asked him about it. "I'm rich, so it doesn't matter really. Most people here are pretty wealthy, or they wouldn't be able to stay here."

Flora DiZazzo, 78, and Jennie Marro, 71, are two residents who don't consider themselves wealthy. Their Medicare HMO is dropping them in January, and they're not sure how they'll get drug coverage come the new year. Cheney "came in late, he went too fast, and then he took off," said Flora, expressing disappointment more appropriate for a deflowered co-ed than a woman of her years and experience. "He was supposed to take questions, that's what we were told." Flora's not sure there's anything in the Bush-Cheney plan for her. "He said there was an income limit of $11,000," she told me as she finished a plate of dessert pastries and sipped a cup of coffee. "That leaves me out!"

Yet it was another sin of omission that hurt Cheney the most with these golden girls. "I don't think he introduced his wife, did he?" asked Flora. "No, he didn't," replied Jennie. "That's why I liked Gore, because he kissed his wife like a man should kiss a woman," said Flora. "Oh, I love that," said Jennie. "Not on the cheek like they're afraid to touch them."

Subj: Word Games
Date: 9/19/2000
From: mwlynch@reason.com

While it was quite a struggle to get the pair to agree to go mano a mano for a national audience in televised debates, the fact is that Gore and Bush have been debating one another via campaign press releases for months. These things get circulated mostly via e-mail and pathetically pick nits on policy proposals, quote journalists back to themselves, and engage in inane wordplay. The Bush folks have a running feature, "The Gore Detector: A Regular Report on Al Gore's Adventures with the Truth." Gore's folks cleverly dubbed Bush's "Change the Tone" tour his "Change the Truth" tour.

Yesterday, I decided to get my proxy Bush-Gore debate in person rather than online. The Center for Economic Development, a middle-of-the-road, business-backed group, rented a room at the Washington Court Hotel for a lunchtime boxing match on Social Security between Princeton economics professor Alan Blinder (weighing in as

HENRY PAYNE

Gore with glasses and even less hair) and former Federal Reserve Gov. Lawrence Lindsey (weighing in as Bush with a brain and 200 extra pounds). My big hope: that these two august persons would become rock 'em–sock 'em wonks and really lay into one another.

Blinder was up first, making his points with black-and-white overhead projector slides. His points were pretty simple and easy to understand: Social Security is a redistributive program, therefore it doesn't matter if it gives higher-paid workers lousy returns and lower-paid workers slightly less lousy returns. Gore will solve the future cash flow problem (less money coming in from workers than going out to gray-haired slackers) by taxing workers at even higher rates.

Blinder didn't quite put it that way, of course. Instead, he talked of shifting general revenues to the Social Security system, which is essentially the same thing. "The central idea of the Gore Plan," read one of Blinder's slides, is that "the huge budget surpluses open up possibilities that no one ever dreamed of just a few years ago. We can now solve both problems without higher taxes or benefit cuts." Blinder did take the opportunity to criticize Bush's plan. The GOP candidate is, he said, avoiding the tradeoffs a privatized approach requires and thus shows a lack of leadership.

Lindsey beat up on Gore, but he threw more jabs than hay-makers. "I'm delighted that the vice president in version 4.0 has come up with a Social Security plan," said Lindsey. "Gore in version 1.0 said there was no problem." Lindsey put up charts that showed how much worse the system is today than eight years ago. He pointed out, more than once, that even though Gore dips a large ladle into the pot of general revenues, he only solves half the money problem.

Bush's plan, said Lindsey, relies on getting increased returns on the current Social Security surplus by letting individuals invest their personal surplus in stocks, bonds, and even lowly money markets.

All in all, a polite and boring affair.

Back in my office, I immediately clicked on my in-box, in search of more biting and petty attacks.

Subj: Harry Browne on the Stump
Date: 9/22/2000
From: mwlynch@reason.com

"It's amazing to see all these people here," a longtime acquaintance told me as we stood in front of the cheese tray at a Harry Browne for President event at an Arlington, Virginia, hotel. "And they even listened to the business attire request in the invitation."

Amazing, indeed. I found myself in a most unlikely situation: surrounded by young, attractive women, each with a full set of teeth, at a Libertarian Party event. I wasn't the only one to notice. Said Troy Dayton, who was covering the event for the digital video Web site Zoom Culture, "You know we are starting to do well when young, good-looking women show up."

Harry Browne has quite a following among the young ladies. "I think I flirted with him once," said Cat DeBurg, a 22-year-old who'd recently dropped out of a teacher credential program to dedicate her life to legalizing dope. "He was making a speech and he looked at me. I smiled and he stuttered over his next line." But don't get the wrong idea. Browne doesn't have any intern problems. Said the purring Cat, "I just shook his hand."

The Libertarian Party is a proud group these days. Browne has gotten generous press, and the party boasts that it's running 1,425 candidates nationwide, more than all other minor parties combined. Such optimism was reflected in the big crowd, which I put at 300. Still, Browne's associates evinced anxiety that not all the attendees were ready for prime time, or even a public viewing. Before bringing Browne onstage, emcee Michael Cloud ran through manner lessons more appropriate for the first day of kindergarten than a political event for adults. "If you agree to hold questions until the end, clap," he nudged the audience, which dutifully put its hands together. "If you agree not to talk to the person sitting next to you, clap."

There were no eruptions or disruptions. Browne took the stage to a standing ovation and proceeded to deliver what I take to be his stump speech. He asks himself three questions, answering each before moving on to the next.

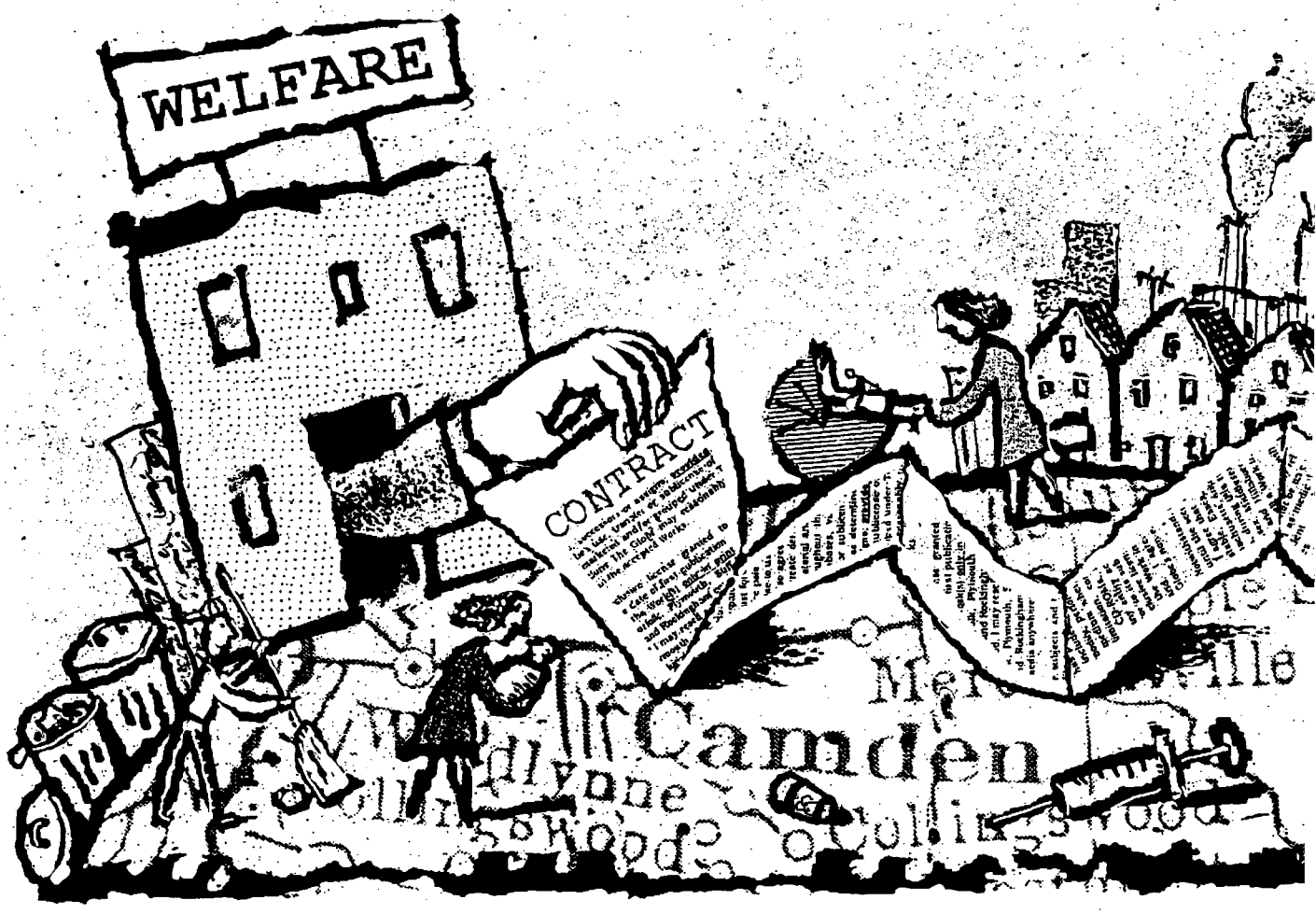
First up was, Why are you running for president? "I'm running for president because I want to be free to live my life the way I see fit, not how Al Gore or George W. Bush wants me to," said Browne. Then came the reality-check query: You don't think you can win, do you? "I think we could have a Libertarian Congress and president by the end of the decade," he said, pointing out that he wouldn't be spending his time campaigning if he didn't think so. He's in his 60s and if liberty isn't achieved in his lifetime, what good is it for him? That sort of logic probably raised the hopes of many in the room. As for the third question in Browne's self-interrogation, truth be told, I can't remember what it was, though he did say it was derivative of the first two.

He spoke with poise, alternating between incitements to outrage (the federal government determines your toilet size and the size of the holes in your Swiss cheese!) and nostalgic evocations of a past that never was (did you know that America had a pristine health care system that was affordable for everyone until the federal government insured the elderly with Medicare and the poor with Medicaid?).

Getting to the end of his remarks, Browne explained his party building strategy: If people want smaller government, we need them to know that a vote for the people with *L* next to their name on the ballot will deliver it, he said. This makes sense. Today, people who want a huge military and prayer in public schools instinctively know to vote *R*. Those who want a larger cut of their neighbor's paycheck know to vote *D*. As for this election, Browne told us we had nothing to lose. "You are never going to win with Republicans or Democrats," he said. "They are never going to give you what you want."

True enough, though judging from this year's campaign promises, they're likely to keep trying.

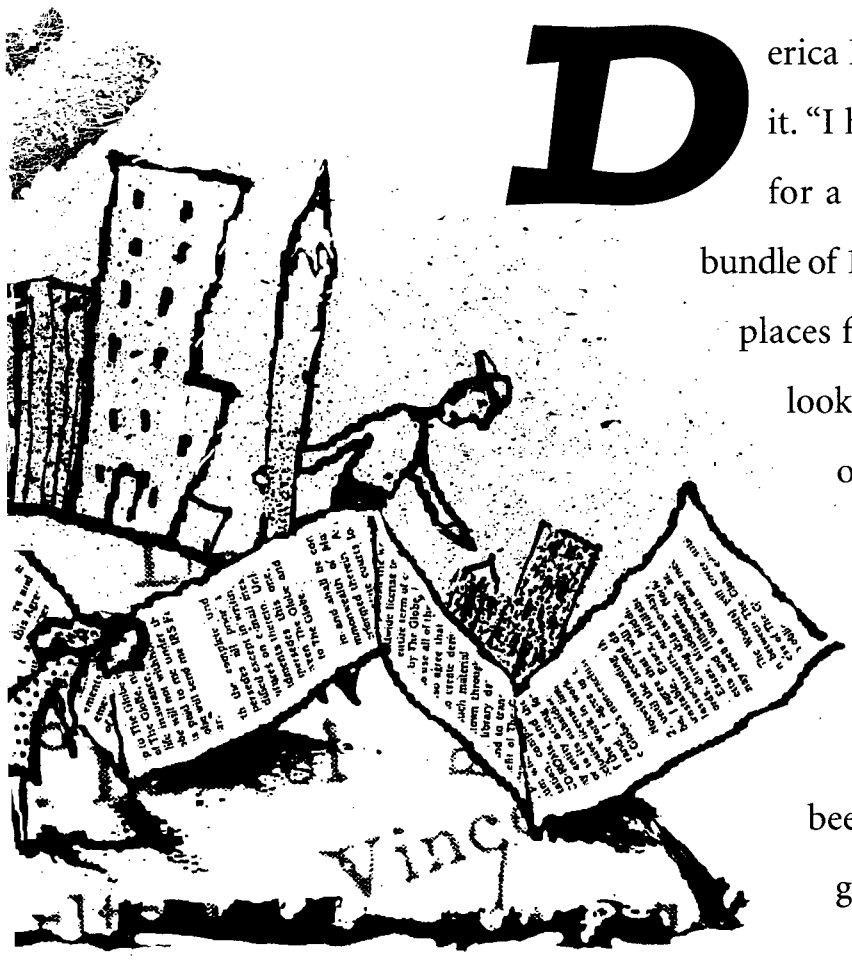
The Hassle



DANIEL BAXTER

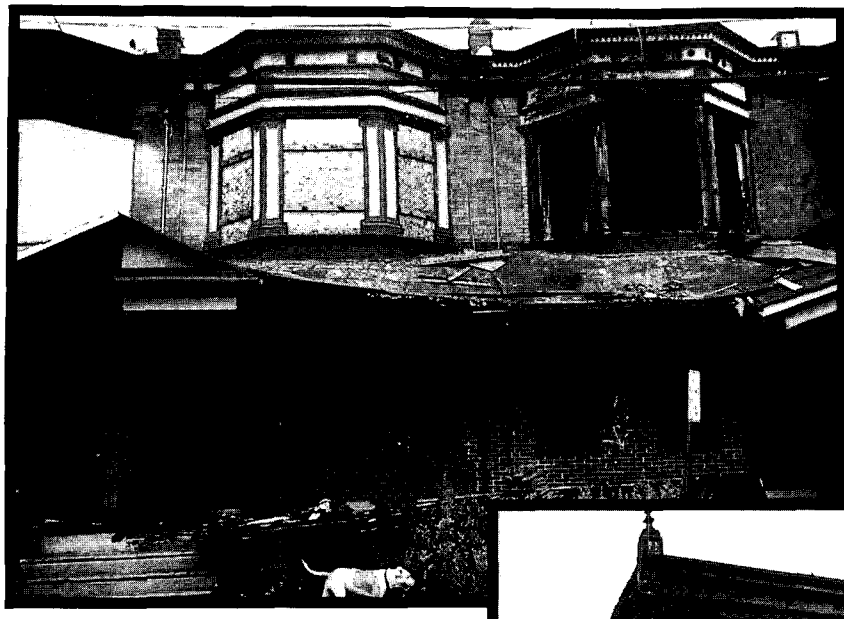
Factor

By Michael W. Lynch
Welfare reform turns check recipients into job seekers



Derica Lee is being hassled and doesn't like it. "I have to fill out all these papers here for a check of $322," she says, waving a bundle of 10 sheets of paper at me, each with five places for employers to verify that she has looked for work. The 20-year-old mother of one hasn't even been on welfare a year, and she has already been "sanctioned" twice for not conforming to the system's requirements. As a result, her monthly check has been halved to $161. And if she doesn't get the 50 employer signatures in the next 11 days, she'll lose that.

Derica is a participant in Work First New Jersey, the Garden State's new welfare program that insists beneficiaries sign a contract to engage in some sort of "work-related activity" for 35 hours a week. Derica's mother and grandmother both relied on welfare to support their families. And when she got tired of being "in the streets" and wanted to take custody of her 4-year-old daughter, she decided to follow in their footsteps. The case workers signed her up for the system, but only after she promised to engage in some activity resembling work. Because she dropped out of high school in the 11th grade, that means going to classes to prepare for her GED in addition to applying for jobs. She has already had two jobs since entering the system in June 1999: a short-term job as a security guard and a job at McDonald's that ended on the first day. "I couldn't take that because they wanted me to wash some toilets," she explains.



Camden street scenes

But toilets or no toilets, the system expects her to work. And if she wants that $161 each month, she has to get those signatures. To assist her in her journeys, the welfare office has included a complimentary bus pass.

"It don't make no sense to do all that," she explains. "If I get all that done, why not just get a job? It ain't worth it."

A Few Miles Into Hell

Derica, dressed in black jeans and a snakeskin jacket, is venting her frustration on a dreary Saturday in Camden, New Jersey. It's March, and I've traveled to Camden to spend a few days investigating the reality of welfare reform in this, one of the great lost cities of America. We're at Nancy's Rest Home, a boarding house for Camden seniors, and we're not alone. Ella Hilton, the daughter of the boarding house's owner and a longtime community activist, is our host. Her friend Cynthia "Cookie" Pulliam sits in the corner under the front window. Seventeen-year-old Tiffany Washington, her belly full with a baby boy due in April, sits in front of the door. Cynthia Jordan Hannah, known as "Blondie," joins us midway.

Everyone in the room except me has personal experience with "the system," the shorthand term for the constellation of government programs, including welfare, HUD, food stamps, and family and youth services, that sets the parameters of life for so many in this grim town of burned-out buildings and empty storefronts. For two-and-a-half hours, we ponder the same questions think tankers, welfare bureaucrats, academics, and advocacy groups are asking about welfare reform: Why have the welfare rolls dropped so drastically? What is happening to those who leave the rolls? Where are they going? Has the reform been successful?

Nancy's Rest Home is located just off Atlantic Avenue, a boulevard of broken dreams if ever there was one. Not dreams of fame or fortune, but the more practical middle-class dream of a stable job that pays the mortgage and gives the kids hope for a brighter future. Brick two-story rowhouses sit abandoned, boarded up, or on the verge of that fate. The most common window-covering in Camden is gray-painted plywood stenciled with "Camden Community Housing Campaign" or "Department of Public Works."

Camden is a place where people are so poor that cigarettes are sold one at a time. It's a town where drug dealers, whose names are well-known to residents, reportedly buy up entire blocks of row houses so as to post effective lookouts. Stand at one of Camden's numerous homeless shelters and look left to see the open-air market for heroin; look right to see where you can pick up a hit of crack. In a city that covers nine square

PHOTOS: MICHAEL W. LYNCH

miles, there's no movie theater and only one supermarket, so far on the south end of town that it's useless to the many residents who don't own cars.

Located directly across the Delaware River from Philadelphia, Camden was once a bustling burg known for its shipyards, its RCA plants, and its Campbell Soup factories. But businesses left Camden years ago, and there is no reason to expect them back anytime soon. New York Ship built its last vessel in 1967; the RCA Building has sat empty for years; and Campbell Soup, still technically headquartered in Camden, quit cooking there about a decade ago.

Today, if you don't work for a government agency or a hospital, you're not likely to work in Camden. Its population peaked at 125,000 in the 1950s. It is now down to 83,000 and dropping. The average household income was a measly $17,386 according to the 1990 Census, compared to $40,927 for New Jersey as a whole. Three thousand buildings sit boarded up. At one time, Camden was the destination for South Jersey shoppers. These days, all that suburbanites send to Camden is their excrement, which is treated at its sewage facility. "Driving into Camden," writes a New Jersey editorialist, "is driving a few miles into hell."

Which is to say that Camden is ground zero in the debate over welfare reform, at least in an urban setting. If reform can work here, it can work anywhere. So does it?

The new welfare system looks great on paper. Four years into it, 6 million Americans have left the rolls and 1 million fewer children are living in official poverty.

Good on Paper

"Welfare reform—it looks good on paper," says Blondie, a compact woman whose idea of an interview is to lecture me in a voice just short of a yell. Blondie has lived in Camden for more than 30 years and has seen many welfare programs come and go; she recently received an award from the city council for her "lifetime of community service." She's skeptical of the abilities of county, city, and federal bureaucrats to make people's lives better. She lives in a world of constant conflict: European-Americans against African-Americans, the system against the people. At Nancy's she tells me how things really work in Camden: "Camden City is based on the slave mentality: 'Yes'm boss, yes'm boss.'"

Blondie unabashedly prefers the old welfare system, the system she was on from 1975 to 1978. She signed up because she had a baby and signed off when she got tired of being on welfare. Still, Blondie credits President Jimmy Carter for her success. She says Carter was for the people because he made getting welfare easier. When she got her act together and decided to go to college, she got to keep her food stamps, welfare check, and Medicaid for three years. "They offered me a good package," says Blondie. After earning her associate's degree, she was hired by the Camden County Board of Social Services and has worked a series of government jobs ever since.

Blondie thinks the current system should do for others what it did for her: let them engage in long-term training that will enable them to have a career, not just a series of $7-an-hour jobs. "I'm talking about putting them into the medical profession," says Blondie, expressing a preference for career training. "Not wiping people's butts, but teaching them how to draw blood."

Blondie is certain that life has gotten worse in Camden's public housing projects since New Jersey started sanctioning women for noncompliance. In Camden crack is still king, and a woman sanctioned off welfare can support herself by attaching herself to a drug dealer. "I get sanctioned 'cause I don't go, so I get me a drug boy," explains Blondie in an extended hypothetical example, as Derica and Tiffany nod in agreement. "He takes good care of me, and my house becomes a rock spot. I got to survive, so that's what I do."

The new welfare system does look great on paper. When President Clinton signed the Republican welfare reform bill into law in August 1996, the predictions were dire. The Urban Institute spit out a study showing 2.6 million Americans—including 1.1 million kids—would be pushed into poverty. Advocates for the poor claimed that, absent a major public jobs program, welfare recipients would be unable to find employment. Americans were told that homeless shelters would fill up and soup kitchens would be deluged as states, free of federal micromanagement, cut spending on social services. Warned Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.) from the Senate floor, "We are putting our children at risk with absolutely no evidence that this radical idea has even the slightest chance of success."

Yet four years out, 6 million Americans have left the rolls, the majority of adults passing the homeless shelters and food kitchens on their way to work. States engaged not in across-the-board cuts but in varied experiments that emphasized and supported work. In many cases, as traditional welfare caseloads plummeted, states shifted spending to support services such as child care and transportation subsidies. The number of Americans living in poverty didn't increase; it dropped. In

Free Ride

Getting people to work

Work First New Jersey inspired the top two welfare administrators for the Gloucester County Board of Social Services to try another line of work: acting. After the law passed in 1996, board director Carol Pirrotta and her deputy, William Gordon, put on a skit for the county Board of Supervisors in which they acted out the likely effects of the new law. Pirrotta played a woman in desperate need of financial help. Gordon, cast in the role of welfare worker, informed her that her five years were up and he had no help to offer. They brought down the house and were invited back for a command performance for the area's state legislators.

If asked to perform the same skit today, Gordon would rewrite the ending: He would give Pirrotta a car.

These days they get a bit giddy talking about welfare reform and what it has allowed them to do for their clients. Instead of giving them a tight script from which to read, the new law allowed them to improvise.

Gloucester is a rural county in the densely populated state of New Jersey. Unlike in Camden, which is connected to surrounding suburbs and Philadelphia by multiple bus routes and train lines, public transportation is not an attractive option for many of the county's far-flung clients. Prior to the reform, the system mandated that anybody engaged in a work or training activity be given $6 per workday for "transportation expenses." "Who knows what they did with this money?" says Gordon. He figures clients considered it a monthly cash bonus of $120. Post reform, however, Pirrotta and Gordon took this money and converted it into bus passes, which cost half as much. For individuals who live far from a bus stop, they created a jitney service that provided rides to bus stops.

Strangely, clients were somehow able to get to work when the option of government transportation was foisted upon them. Says Gordon, "All of a sudden they say, 'I think my uncle gave me a car last week.'" The jitney driver was at times as lonely as a Maytag repairman. That upset him but pleased Pirrotta and Gordon, who took the remaining money and convinced the state to let them go into the car business.

For clients who have held a job for three months straight but have severe transportation problems, Pirrotta and Gordon will buy a used car, pay New Jersey's high insurance rates for half a year, and even pay to clean up some non-DUI related driving fines. After six months, the clients are on their own for insurance and must start paying the state for the car. As of June, they've provided seven people with cars.

Carmela DeSilvio fits the profile of severe transportation needs. Before showing up to work at 9 a.m., she must get her four children to day care and school. At the end of the day, she reverses the drill. She lives in a rural development, so buses aren't a viable option. The 1989 Ford Taurus station wagon the county helped her purchase is. The car costs her $83 a month. After a year, it will be all hers. Six weeks of insurance costs $149.

DeSilvio first went on welfare for a brief spell in 1982, when as a junior in high school, she had her first daughter. She landed back on the rolls after her divorce in 1992. "I was pregnant and I needed money," she explains. She applied for welfare and food stamps. She received $488 for the former, roughly $300 for the latter, and moved in with her mom.

Today, DeSilvio works for the system, instead of being on it, helping current and former welfare mothers arrange day care. Her car allows her to get to work and get her kids to school and day care. A day care voucher pays a portion of her youngest child's day care bill, and she is eligible for a Medicaid extension, although her county job provides her with health insurance. She takes home $750 every two weeks and rents her own home, which she plans to purchase with the help of yet another government program. Her life is more stressful now—and the kids are more likely to eat hot dogs for dinner these days than a full home-cooked meal—but she's grateful to be off welfare. "It's a horrible life," she says of welfare. "It's really not enough money to do anything. You have to live with people. And the system controls everything."

By removing the barriers to work—in many cases, simply taking away people's excuses—Pirrotta and Gordon have put people like DeSilvio to work. Based on past boom times, Pirrotta figured the caseload would settle at 2,000. Since July 1997, though, the county's welfare rolls have dropped 65 percent, to just 686 cases.

When the reforms first got under way, observers assumed the decline in caseloads would level off quickly. Several years into reform, though, "people are still asking when will it end," says Pirrotta, her face breaking into a big smile.

—Michael W. Lynch

1998, the last year for which data are available, 2 million fewer Americans—1 million fewer children—lived in official poverty than in 1996. In New Jersey, welfare rolls have dropped by nearly half since 1997; the same is true for the city of Camden.

Not Your Mother's Welfare System

Cookie, born in Richmond, Virginia, in 1957, came to Camden as a baby and has lived most of her life in Camden's public housing, where she is a fixture. Children play in front of her apartment, located next to a community center where she supervises recreation programs. When a friend is pregnant, she hosts a shower, as she did for Tiffany just before I arrived in Camden. When people need a place to stay, she puts them up. By her own admission, her world is limited, but she is not afraid to try new things. She is proud of what she has made of her life. None of her five children has ended up on drugs, on the system, or in jail. Her youngest, a boy, is a high school basketball star. She did her time on welfare, and she is glad to be off. I ask about the difference between being on and off welfare. "I feel good about myself," she tells me. "I don't have to answer questions like, 'Do you have insurance for your kids? Do you have a car? Do you have money in the bank?'" Says Cookie: "Yes, I have money in the bank. I work hard for it. I feel good I don't have to answer to none of that. All I have to do is pay my bills and keep on going."

As we sit discussing the system, old and new, it strikes me that Cookie's and Derica's experiences encapsulate a fundamental shift in the system, an inversion of the incentives. The system Cookie faced was easy to get on and hard to get off. Derica is facing one that's hard to get on and easy to get off.

When Cookie had her first baby at 18, shortly after graduating from Woodrow Wilson High School in 1976, the system welcomed her with open arms. When, as the mother of a 2-week-old infant, she showed up to apply for assistance, she says the caseworker asked, "Why did you wait so long?" She immediately got a grant of $235 a month, and her rent was set at the standard 30 percent of her cash income. She received food stamps and Medicaid. She and her sister got an automatic transfer out of her mother's public housing unit to an apartment of their own. Within a year, she had her own unit. She struggled but managed to get by, supplementing her income at one point by being a foster parent. (Such income didn't affect her welfare check or rent.)

Why was it hard to get off the system? At the time, giving up the cash grant meant giving up other benefits. Unless a recipient got long term training, like Blondie did, saying goodbye to welfare meant saying goodbye to Medicaid. For every $3 Cookie earned over her welfare grant, a rent increase would gobble up $1. If she made too much money, her food stamps would be reduced. These policies combined to create a punitively high marginal tax.

It's not that people couldn't work their way off. Cookie left in 1990 for a job as a recreation aide at her housing complex's community center. But the combined benefits were more than many individuals could expect to earn from a job, though not enough to live on comfortably. That reality was hardly limited to Camden or New Jersey. According to the Cato Institute, in 1995 the benefit packages of 40 states paid better than an $8-an-hour job; in New Jersey, it equaled $12.75 an hour. For many low-skill women, the old welfare system was a deal that couldn't be beat.

Work First New Jersey, Gov. Christine Todd Whitman's welfare package that became law in March 1997, changed this. It wasn't the state's first attempt at reform. In 1992 New Jersey enacted a controversial family cap law that meant recipients who gave birth to additional children while on welfare wouldn't get any extra money. At the same time, the state increased post-welfare support, extending Medicaid and child care support for individuals who left welfare; the state also created training and community college–based education programs. Birth rates declined, but a Rutgers University study found that the education and training programs didn't help people get off welfare any sooner, stay off any longer, or at-

tain higher-paying jobs than folks who were left alone.

Work First New Jersey is succeeding by all three measures. While federal law allows states to give individuals up to two years to find a job, in New Jersey clients must go to work right away. If you're under 18, your job is to finish school. If you're over 18, your job is to get a job. If you've worked in the last year, it's straight into an intensive job search, the goal of which is to avoid getting on the system in the first place. If you don't have a high school diploma, you must work toward a GED. But you will spend 35 hours a week in some "work-related activity" to earn your assistance money. Counties run Community Work Experience Programs, which offer on-the-job training at government agencies and nonprofits, and Alternative Work Experience Programs, which offer remedial education programs for individuals who need basic skills before they are likely to be hired. If an individual doesn't comply, then she gets sanctioned like Derica Lee, and her check is cut in half. After 90 days of inaction, her case is closed. On average, New Jersey closes 300 to 400 cases a month due to sanctions.

So when Derica says she might as well get a job, she's not kidding. This, in essence, makes the new system hard to get on. A client is faced with a long, privacy-invading application and a contract in which she must promise to look for work. The payoff is a cash grant of $322 for one child, $424 for two children, and assistance finding a job or placement in a full-time job training program. Considering the hassles, unless you're in a crisis situation or actually want the training, you might as well just look for work.

Unlike earlier programs, recipients get to keep most of their wages. Individuals lose only 50 cents of their grant for each dollar they earn, so even low-paying, part-time work can make one financially better off. Medicaid, food stamps, childcare vouchers, and, in some cases, public housing rents have been separated from the cash grant. The average wage earned by individuals who leave welfare for work in New Jersey is $7.31 an hour. The federal Earned Income Tax Credit can also add more than $3,000 a year to the wages of individuals working full time for $7 an hour.

This all adds up. According to a study of Work First New Jersey conducted for the state by Mathematica Policy Research, those who left welfare for work earned an average of $1,600 a month. Those who remained on the system and stayed unemployed took in an average of just under $800 a month. Such a disparity isn't unique to New Jersey. Says Douglas Besharov of the American Enterprise Institute, "The clear consensus of all the studies is that folks who are working are doing better than folks who stay on welfare."

The View From the Top

The folks who actually run Camden's system aren't convinced that people are better off under the new plan. They're not sure they are working. They're not even sure where they are.

"I don't know where they've all gone," says Andrea Rauer, who runs Camden County's social service department. "I don't know where my clients are." Rauer expresses her concern in the department's second-floor conference room, where we're joined by three other top social service officials. Plaques of appreciation sent by the Red Cross, a local high school, and the U.S. Department of Social Services adorn the room's walls, assuring me we're sitting in a place where good works are done.

The drastic drop in the welfare rolls shocked everyone in this room. Yet with more than 130 years of combined experience working social services in Camden, they're not sure what to make of it, or even if it's a good thing. Of this much they're certain: Work First New Jersey has made their jobs harder, as the state has put pressure on them to get people off the rolls. "There's not much difference in the stress levels now between those serving the poor and the poor themselves," says Clement Carney, deputy director of the Camden County Board of Social Services, who later adds, "It's like we have a gun on us. The state is telling us, 'You have too many people on the dole; you get them off.'"

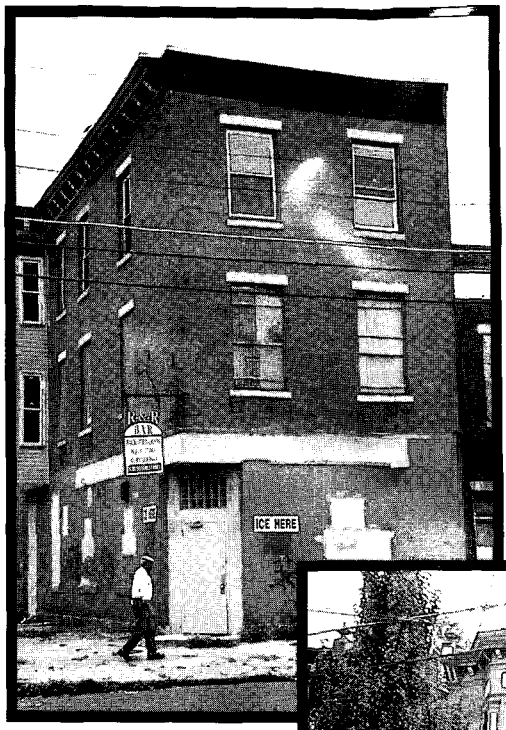
The folks who actually run Camden's welfare system aren't convinced that people are better off under the new plan. They're not sure they are working. They're not even sure where they are.

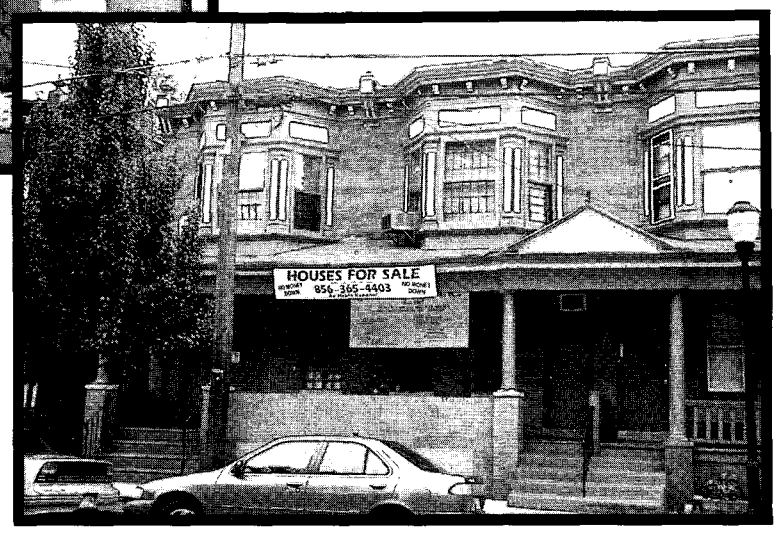
The board's payroll has dropped along with its clients. It once employed 800 people; today that's down to about 600. "The truth of the matter is that we are no different from clients," says Carney, whose sharp edge and animated face convey a sincere concern about the program. "They want to get rid of the clients and those who are serving them."

Overall, opinions of the reform expressed in the conference room range from dismissive vitriol to cautious optimism. All but one of the officials like the emphasis on responsibility and the program's increased flexibility. Frank Ambrose, who supervises case managers, thinks the caseload reduction is a sign of success. Sandra Mayers, who administers the board's income maintenance programs, disagrees. The 37-year social service veteran decries the reform as "mean-spirited"

and slams a state-made video heralding its success as "a fucking P.R. piece-of-shit lie."

"Cash grants are down," says Carney. "I can't tell you if that's good or not. I really don't know what happened to all these families. I think yeah, there's been economic advantage and a lot of people did move out, but whether they are in self-sufficient, career opportunity jobs or whether they are doubled up in housing, I don't know yet."





Why is it so hard to find out where former welfare recipients have landed? Part of the reason is that once people leave the system, the government no longer tracks them. If people are working, you might expect to see evidence of it in the community—more entrepreneurial activity, small industry, shops, and the like. But it's hard to find any of that. "I don't know what the impact on the city would be," says Frank Ambrose, who notes, "You don't see building. You don't see any new companies coming in."

Most national studies of women who've left welfare show that upward of 60 percent of them are working. In New Jersey, Mathematica Policy Research found that 56 percent of former welfare clients in its statewide sample were employed. But no one knows for sure if these figures apply to Camden.

They do know, however, why people are leaving: Welfare isn't worth the hassle. "We put pressure on the recipients to do something," says Ambrose, who thinks the program is getting people to work. "Prior to this we had job training programs, but people weren't put under pressure. We weren't very threatening."

Hitting the Floor Smiling

Ted Goertzel, a sociologist at Rutgers University's Camden campus, started studying welfare recipients in 1992, when the first wave of reform hit New Jersey. Since then, he has conducted a series of focus groups with welfare clients. In the early 1990s, Goertzel says, the assumption among welfare recipients was that the system would always be there, that it was a force of nature. "I would try to raise the question about what would you like to do for a career, for work," says Goertzel. "And it was like talking to kids in grade school. Work was something that was very far off, unrealistic, maybe they'd like to work with children, be a physician. It was nothing practical, nothing that would happen in the short term."

Today, Goertzel finds meaningful short-term planning. "They realize that they are going to have to find jobs, that they have to find some way to support themselves, that they can't rely on the welfare system as a permanent security blanket," says Goertzel. "That idea has gotten across."

Polls and individual experience support Goertzel's focus-group findings. The Mathematica survey found that more than 80 percent of Work First clients know that welfare benefits are limited and that they must work to continue to receive them. Six in 10 said the law's time limits affected their decisions, prompting them to try harder to find and keep jobs or seek out training to get them off welfare. Even a study by Legal Services of New Jersey that doesn't mask the authors' disdain for the new system concedes that it has made clients understand that they must work.

Welfare veteran Deborah Keys was hassled off the system. I catch up with her a week later at Camden's Housing Authority office, where she has just ended a workday spent remodeling a public housing unit. The 46-year-old Keys decided welfare wasn't worth it when her caseworker told her she would have to go to school or get a job to keep receiving her grant. Keys protested that she wasn't going to work for free. Her caseworker retorted that she wasn't going to get her check. "I said, 'I'll find a job somewhere, somebody will give me a job,'" recalls Keys. "I'm not going to go somewhere and work for free just for that little bit of money."

Keys first went on welfare in 1971. She was 17 and had just

given birth to the first of five children. The Camden native had already dropped out of school, which she found boring, and needed a way to support her baby. She has held many jobs since then, working as a nurse's aide, department store clerk, and cashier. But the jobs always ended, and she always ended up back on the system, which is where she was when Work First New Jersey became law.

At first, Keys enrolled in a job training program run by the local housing authority and a nonprofit. It was a 13-week course in construction skills taught by an official from the local carpentry union. The promise was that the union would pick up the newly trained individuals. Keys says that didn't happen. "We just get one lie after another," she says. "Not one of us has been picked up."

The housing authority, however, hired Keys to rehab units for $9 an hour. Now she says she's better off both financially and emotionally for it. Keys emphasizes that she's not knocking welfare: It was there when she needed it, and for many people, she says, especially older women with health problems, it's still necessary. But she feels better about herself when she's working. She's proud of the example she sets for her children, the youngest now 14. She likes to buy her groceries with cash, rather than food stamps, or "foodies," as they are known in Camden.

"I love it," says one former welfare recipient when she's asked about her job. "I wake up and hit the floor smiling every morning. Even when I have problems I smile."

Key's finances have improved. Her last welfare payout was $322 a month. Now her take-home pay is $268 a week. Money is still tight, and she says she struggles at times, especially around Christmas. She is still not saving—she is using any extra money to pay down credit cards and other debts. And she is not entirely off the system. A diabetic, she'll be on Medicaid for at least another year, or for as long as they allow it. After that, she figures she'll have to pay her doctor herself.

Keys has ambitious plans for the future. The week before we meet, she has filed papers to start a construction company, Aames Construction LLC, in a partnership with an established local contractor. She is optimistic this venture will work, even though she has already started and buried one company, Keys Construction LLC, due to problems with her partner.

"I love it," she says, her paint-speckled face lighting up when she's asked about her job. "I wake up and hit the floor smiling every morning. Even when I have problems I smile."

Hurdles Ahead

Federal lawmakers set some specific goals in their 1996 welfare reform bill. They set out to "end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work and marriage"; "reduce the incidence of out of wedlock pregnancies"; and "encourage the formation of and maintenance of two-parent families." To achieve these ends, the new system must not only move current welfare recipients like Keys into permanent work but also prevent the next generation from signing up. Childless women must remain so until they are fully able to support a family through work. Women with children must refrain from having more until they can do likewise.

Keys represents a successful aspect of the new system. But whether the new system is a complete success—in New Jersey and elsewhere—depends on the story of someone who wasn't smiling much on that March morning at Nancy's Rest Home.

At 17, Tiffany Washington has been groomed since birth to take her place in the cycle of poverty. Raised on welfare and in public housing, she was shuttled between her grandmother, mother, and aunt. "When I needed my mom, she wasn't there," she says. "She was in jail, incarcerated, drugs and everything. I don't have a dad." Tears start to roll out of her eyes and over her young cheeks.

In late April, Tiffany gave birth to a 10-pound boy, Rasheen Tyree Fisher. She has big plans for him and herself—plans that don't include welfare. "I don't want it," she says. "I see what my mom went through and what others went through. It's better for me to get a job." She's finishing her junior year at Camden High via homeschooling. Last summer, she planned to put Rasheen in day care and get a job before returning to Camden High to complete her senior year. After that, it's on to Camden College, where she wants to study to be a nurse. She hopes to get married someday.

Tiffany is a former track star who tripped on a common hurdle for young women in Camden: teen pregnancy. Now she must get up and go on. If, by erecting barriers to welfare dependence, the system pushes her to achieve even half of her goals, the reforms will be a success.

But Tiffany still has a long way to run.

Michael W. Lynch (mwlynch@reason.com) is Washington editor of REASON.

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The Pursuit of Happiness

Controversial philosopher Peter Singer argues for animal rights, utilitarian ethics, and *A Darwinian Left.*

The New Yorker calls him "the most influential living philosopher." His critics call him "the most dangerous man in the world." Peter Singer, the De Camp Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University's Center for Human Values, is most widely and controversially known for his view that animals have the same moral status as humans. He is the author of many books, including *Practical Ethics* (1979), *Rethinking Life and Death* (1995), and *Animal Liberation* (1975), which has sold more than 450,000 copies. This year he published *Writings on an Ethical Life* (Ecco Press) and *A Darwinian Left: Politics, Evolution, and Cooperation* (Yale University Press), which argues that the left must replace Marx with Darwin if it is to remain a viable force.

Singer is perhaps the most thoroughgoing philosophical utilitarian since Jeremy Bentham. As such, he believes animals have rights because the relevant moral consideration is not whether a being can reason or talk but whether it can suffer. Jettisoning the traditional distinction between humans and nonhumans, Singer distinguishes instead between persons and nonpersons. Persons are beings that feel, reason, have self-awareness, and look forward to a future. Thus, fetuses and some very impaired human beings are not persons in his view and have a lesser moral status than, say, adult gorillas and chimpanzees.

GALIA LERECH

Interviewed by Ronald Bailey

Given such views, it was no surprise that anti-abortion activists and disability rights advocates loudly decried the Australian-born Singer's appointment at Princeton last year. Indeed, his language regarding the treatment of disabled human beings is at times appallingly similar to the eugenic arguments used by Nazi theorists concerning "life unworthy of life." Singer, however, believes that only parents, not the state, should have the power to make decisions about the fates of disabled infants.

Singer has made similarly controversial plunges into social policy. In a recent *New York Times Magazine* essay, he argued that the affluent in developed countries are killing people by not giving away to the poor all of their wealth in excess of their needs. How did he come to this conclusion? "If...allowing someone to die is not intrinsically different from killing someone, it would seem that we are all murderers," he explains in *Practical Ethics*. He calculates that the average American household needs $30,000 per year; to avoid murder, anything over that should be given away to the poor. "So a household making $100,000 could cut a yearly check for $70,000," he wrote in the *Times*.

Rigorous adherence to a single principle has a way of hoisting one by one's own petard. Singer's mother suffers from severe Alzheimer's disease, and so she no longer qualifies as a person by his own standards, yet he spends considerable sums on her care. This apparent contradiction of his principles has not gone unnoticed by the media. When I asked him about it during our interview at his Manhattan apartment in late July, he sighed and explained that he is not the only person who is involved in making decisions about his mother (he has a sister). He did say that if he were solely responsible, his mother might not be alive today.

Singer's proclamation about income has also come back to haunt him. To all appearances, he lives on far more than $30,000 a year. Aside from the Manhattan apartment—he asked me not to give the address or describe it as a condition of granting an interview—he and his wife Renata, to whom he has been married for some three decades, have a house in Princeton. The average salary of a full professor at Princeton runs around $100,000 per year; Singer also draws income from a trust fund that his father set up and from the sales of his books. He says he gives away 20 percent of his income to famine relief organizations, but he is certainly living on a sum far beyond $30,000. When asked about this, he forthrightly admitted that he was not living up to his own standards. He insisted that he was doing far more than most and hinted that he would increase his giving when everybody else started contributing similar amounts of their incomes.

There is some question as to how seriously one should take the dictates of a person who himself cannot live up to them. If he finds it impossible to follow his own rules, perhaps that means that he should reconsider his conclusions. Singer would no doubt respond that his personal failings hardly invalidate his ideas.

In his mid 50s, Singer is a rail-thin, quietly genial man who seems very comfortable with himself. At one point I asked him, "If it resulted in an overall increase in the happiness of morally significant beings, whoever they may be, would you favor the slow, painful torture of professional philosophers, including ethicists?" His reply was good-natured: "I find it fortunately hard to imagine the circumstances in which that would occur, but if I were absolutely persuaded that this was the only way to do it, I guess I would have to."

Reason: *A Darwinian Left* argues that the left must dump Marx, whose ideas have not fared well in the real world, and replace him with Darwin. Why bother to reinvigorate the left, especially if it means jettisoning its foundational thinker?

Peter Singer: That's a question that an American would be more likely to ask than someone from Britain or Australia or Western Europe. When I wrote this book, I wasn't living in the United States. I started work on it in order to give a lecture at the London School of Economics. I think the assumptions Americans often make that the left is dead or moribund is not an assumption that any Australian or British or Western European would make. There are leftist governments in power there. You can argue about how you define the left, but most people would say, I think, that the governments in power in Britain and Germany, say, are leftist governments. There was a left-wing government in power in Australia until 1996, and may well be again. So this is an ongoing part of politics. I think America is a little exceptional in that respect, but even here I think there is clearly a left of varying shades. So the question of how should the left proceed and what sort of ideas should it have is what preoccupied me, rather than seeing it as in need of reinvigorating.

Reason: What limits does Darwinian thinking put on the left's core goal of fostering egalitarianism?

Singer: I think understanding Darwinian thinking makes us realize that humans are not by nature egalitarian. To the contrary and by nature, they form hierarchies and rankings and try to move

up those hierarchies. That doesn't mean that you can't or shouldn't work toward a more egalitarian society, but it does mean that you should be aware that you won't be able to do so simply by removing artificial contrivances that maintain inequality. You'll have to do more than that. You'll have to do something positive in order to promote or maintain equality, and there will be costs in doing that. The question the left then has to ask is, What costs are worth paying and what costs aren't worth paying?

Reason: What are those costs? What are the limits that this kind of thinking would set on a program of egalitarianism?

Singer: I don't see theoretical limits. You could imagine societies in which people maintain by fairly stern authoritarian measures equality of wealth. It's hard to imagine them all having equality of power, because if it were an authoritarian society some people would have to be telling others what to do, but conceivably that could be distributed in an egalitarian way.

Reason: Let me put it differently: What limits *should* be set on a program of egalitarianism?

Singer: Right, right. That's a different question. I think the limits ought to be essentially those that can be achieved without the kind of authoritarianism that would be incompatible with fairly liberal democratic traditions and without enormous costs and enormous loss. You have to consider whether you're going to trade off some element of the total overall prosperity of a society for the sake of having it be more egalitarian. I think those are questions of judgment. I think it's reasonable to trade off some measure of that, but obviously not enough to create a widespread hardship.

Reason: What do you think would be a reasonable tradeoff?

Singer: I would look at it in terms of meeting people's basic needs and providing for a certain level of comfort. I think the kind of thing you're talking about is if you could ensure that there are virtually no people whose basic needs for food, shelter, warmth—those sorts of things—are not being met. I think that might be something that was worth doing, but I emphasize only if you could do it without introducing authoritarian measures, and that's a separate question.

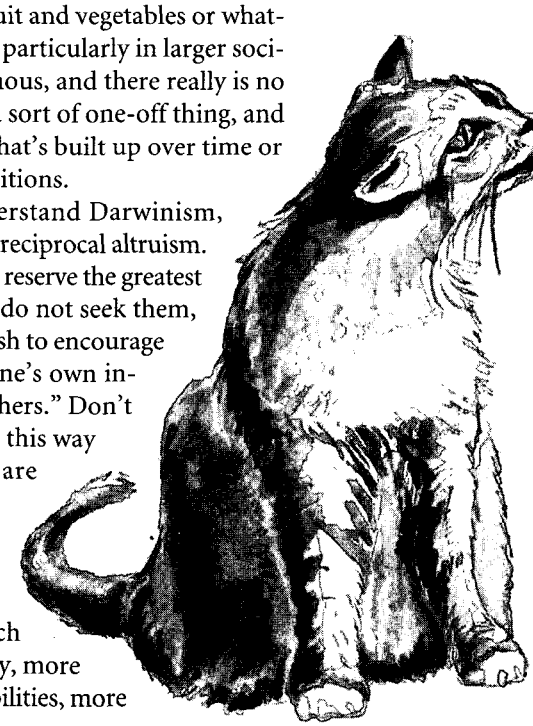
Reason: It is very popular among some segments of the intellectual left to say that various aspects of society are "socially constructed" in the sense that humans are radically free to make social institutions and social roles be whatever we want them to be. Yet you argue that some common human tendencies—including hierarchy, male dominance, and sex roles—transcend cultural variation. Are the social constructivists deluded by ideology?

Singer: I think they are factually in error. At least, that's my best guess. This is obviously an area where there are no demonstrable proofs, but I would say that the evidence that's been coming in—the evidence of evolutionary theory, the evidence of cross-cultural comparisons, the evidence of looking at our closer primate relatives—suggests that these things are not simply culturally constructed.

Reason: You write, "Modern Darwinian thought embraces both competition and reciprocal altruism, which is really a more technical term for cooperation." You also write, "Modern market economies are premised on the idea that we are all dominated by acquisitive and competitive desires." But aren't markets really the primary arenas for reciprocal altruism? I give you something in exchange for something you give me back. There's a lot of reciprocal altruism in markets. Billions of transactions take place every day in the market, and 99.9 percent of the time both parties go away happy.

Singer: Yes, you can see markets as involving reciprocal altruism. Certainly they involve all sorts of relationships, and that's part of it. In the statement you read I was thinking not so much of ongoing trading relationships [as] the mentality of advertising—that is, essentially seeing consumers as acquisitive and trying to attract their acquisitive desires to this product rather than that product.

When I'm thinking of reciprocal altruism, I'm thinking of things where there is not just a single exchange but an ongoing relationship. A lot of those billions of transactions do take place in ongoing relationships, where you go to the same little outlet that sells your fruit and vegetables or whatever. But a lot of them, particularly in larger societies, get more anonymous, and there really is no such relationship. It's a sort of one-off thing, and it's not a relationship that's built up over time or that has the same conditions.



Reason: As I understand Darwinism, there's nothing beyond reciprocal altruism. As you write, "We often reserve the greatest rewards for those who do not seek them, precisely because we wish to encourage readiness to sacrifice one's own interest for the sake of others." Don't people who sacrifice in this way understand that they are engaging in a kind of tit for tat: "If I do this risky thing, there's a good chance I will get a good reputation, which will lead to more money, more attractive mating possibilities, more

children, etc."? By reserving rewards for such sacrifices, haven't we constructed a society where people understand tit for tat in this larger sense? And doesn't that fit well within the notion of Darwinian reciprocal altruism?

Singer: I think that's a slightly cynical interpretation of why people do these things. You say, "Well, they all know that"—so it suggests that in some way this has more or less consciously got into their motivation. There are many cases of altruistic acts that are more spontaneous than that, or more anonymous than that. A lot of people give to the blood bank, but they don't go out wearing the little badges that say, "I gave to the blood bank today." Some people do, but a lot of them don't. So it's not clear who's going to know about altruistic behavior or how they're going to get rewarded for it. Where I'm talking about altruism, I'm excluding those people who are doing it with the sense of getting a reward for it. This is what I call genuine altruism, as distinct from reciprocal altruism. There can be such people who act because they do in fact get rewarded, but that's a somewhat separate question from what their conscious motivations are for doing it.

Reason: You admit in the book that a very small proportion of the people in society will actually be motivated to genuine altruism. What kind of institutions do you see for increasing that number, given Darwinian constraints?

Singer: You can only do it in a piecemeal, experimental way and see what's going to work. You can create the opportunities for it, and you can see whether people will voluntarily come to it. I think those experiments are interesting. Obviously, the blood bank is an institution with a long history. Bone marrow registers are more recent, require a significantly greater sacrifice, and attract a smaller number of people. But they still attract numbers that are real, and that may be sufficient for it to achieve its purposes.

Reason: Both Japan and Britain have to import from the United States about half their blood plasma because they don't get enough from donations. The reason the United States is the world's largest exporter of human plasma is that we have commercial blood collection centers. So in a certain sense, if it's a good thing to do, to have these supplies, why not commercialize it?

Singer: There's at least an argument to say that the opportunity to give altruistically is something that fosters a sense of community, a sense of community ties. It is not entirely a coincidence that the United States has more commercial ways of doing these things. Maybe they do produce more plasma, but on most accounts the United States is also a society which has weaker social ties. Individuals tend to be isolated more easily and so on; perhaps this has some broader social costs as well.

Reason: What does Darwinian thinking tell the left about why so many of the social programs they have favored have had difficulties or have failed?

Singer: It tells the left that some of them have failed because their goals were really unrealistic. For example, if their goals were to achieve equality and to combine that with a high degree of liberty—to have the state withering away, as Marx said—it's very difficult to see how you're going to be able to achieve that. If you let the state wither away, then humans' natural tendencies to form hierarchies and rank and so on are going to assert themselves. What happened specifically with the form of communism that was attempted in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe was that people went into it with some vague idea that they could have this sort of society. But they kept needing to strengthen the power of the state rather than allow it to wither away. In that sense, the original idea would just collapse. You simply couldn't achieve it. Human beings are not such that you could expect them to work for the common good in the way that the theory assumed. The failure to understand that human nature is not as plastic as socialists often assume is a substantial part of why some of these schemes have failed.

Reason: Would you agree that the pursuit of equality as the primary social goal is the source of most of the human suffering in the 20th century?

Singer: That's a bit of an overstatement. I don't see the suffering generated by the Nazis as in pursuit of equality. But it has undoubtedly been the source of significant amounts of suffering, perhaps because of its failures and also because of the regimes that it allowed to become established. I mean, I don't really see the existence of Stalin as the most direct thing related to the pursuit of equality, but you could say his regime grew out of the pursuit of equality. So that's true, and I think that's why I'm saying that the left has to moderate those aims. It already has to a good extent, but it has to consider what aims it really values enough to stick to, given various costs that would need to be paid.

Reason: Some welfare policies eliminate tit for tat, so that even if beneficiaries don't cooperate, they still get rewarded. What are the policy implications of that insight? One of the things often said by proponents of market forces is that poverty is

like anything else—the more money you pay for it, the more of it you can get.

Singer: Yes. This is a good case where there are two values at stake that you need to try to sort out. On the one hand, I think those on the left will want to say we don't want to see anyone starving in a society that's as wealthy as the United States. We don't want to see anyone without shelter. Maybe most people would also say we don't want to see anyone *without* basic levels of health care.

[But] if you give those things to people and there's no reciprocity, then, human nature being what it is, aren't they simply going to take advantage of the fact that you're giving it to them and cease to be productive in any way? You really have to be more careful than some of these schemes were, when initially promoted, in trying to distinguish people who can reciprocate and those who can't for [a good] reason.

Reason: Well, do you cut off those who can but just won't cooperate?

Singer: You keep them to a really bare minimum at that point. It doesn't take much to feed someone so that they're getting enough calories and so that they're not seriously hungry or undernourished. It doesn't take much to provide someone with the opportunity to have a warm, dry bed if they're willing to use it. You keep them at that very bare minimum.

Reason: So would you approve of what we've been doing in this country with workfare programs?

Singer: Yeah, as long as they're sufficiently attuned to allow for people who can't take part in that. I think requiring people to work for a reasonable kind of social security benefit is a good thing to do.

Reason: Is it possible that we are being misled by our reasoning into thinking that there is something more to ethics than evolved behavior—that all this talk is simply beside the point?

Singer: That's certainly possible. I don't really have a yes or no answer to that question. At some ultimate, deep level that may be the case, that the most fundamental moral commitments are not matters of knowledge and therefore are not things which we can say are true or false.

But there's nevertheless a lot of reasoning that can go on in ethics. Think about why you might think that abortion is wrong or why you might think it's justified: How does that fit with your general view about the sanctity of human life? Within these frameworks, you can say that's a statement that's inconsistent with something you said before, or that's an arbitrary way of drawing a line that you can't really defend, or that's not a well-grounded statement.

Reason: Could it be that our behaviors are constrained so that we really aren't able to choose? Are we deluding ourselves into thinking that we can actually choose to do one thing or another?

Singer: Darwinian theory suggests that choices are constrained in a sense that statistically you can predict what most people will do under some circumstances. But that's different from the sort of first-person sense of freedom that we have, where we're facing a question and we have this strong sense that we are free to choose what to do. Really, we are free to choose in the sense that if I decide that this is what I'm going to do, I can get up and do it, even if statistically it's going to be rare for people to do that. The sense of freedom there is genuine. I'm what has been called a "compatibilist" or a "soft determinist"—I think determinism is true, but it doesn't eliminate the claim that we have a choice and that we are responsible for our choices.

Determinism is true in the sense that if you knew everything about the world at state A, you would be able to predict what it would be like in state B later. But freedom is also real in the sense in which the world confronts us as a real capacity for choice. It's a mistake to simply dismiss it as an illusion. The kind of choice required for responsibility and for saying that someone is free is not something that is incompatible with the belief that their actions are caused. Think about the conditions for holding someone responsible: If they did something because they'd been drugged, then we say they're not free, they're not responsible. But if they did something because they sat there, they thought about it, and in the end the reasons and the values that they held led them to choose A rather than B, well, we say they're responsible. You could also say that if we'd known everything about them, we could have predicted that they would choose A rather than B. But they made a choice because they were free from all of those other factors which diminish responsibility.

Reason: So we choose among relevant causes?

Singer: That's right—the sorts of causes that we associate with a person being autonomous and those that make for free decisions.

Reason: From the perspective of the left, what is wrong with Huxley's *Brave New World*? Nearly everybody in that society is having a perfectly pleasurable time. They are certainly not suffering. Why is that not a moral world?

Singer: I shouldn't answer that on behalf of all the left because many on the left have differing values. It's in fact a tougher question for a utilitarian or a consequentialist like myself, who regards happiness or satisfaction of preferences as the ultimate value. There might be some on the left who see freedom as an ultimate value, and for them the

"The failure to understand that human nature is not as plastic as socialists often assume is a substantial part of why some of these schemes have failed."

"Over some time scale, we will learn [to control our genes], and if people want to change human nature, they will have the power to do so."

objection to *Brave New World* would be that these people are being programmed and therefore aren't free. From my point of view, it all depends on whether people like the "savage" are rare—1 in 10 million or something like that—and whether the rest of the people are perfectly content and happy. If the choice is a society in which there's vastly more misery through violence, conflict, poverty, and so on, and you could bring about a *Brave New World*–like society, that would be fine. That would be an ideal society.

Reason: Part of what provokes my question about *Brave New World* is your last paragraph in *A Darwinian Left.*

Singer: Ah, right. The stuff about genetics.

Reason: You write: "For the first time since life emerged from the primeval soup, there are beings who understand how they came to be what they are. To those who fear adding to the power of government and the scientific establishment, this seems more of a danger than a source of freedom. In the more distant future that we can still barely glimpse, it may turn out to be the prerequisite of a new kind of freedom." You seem to hold out the possibility that science could eventually fulfill the left's dream of a malleable human nature.

Singer: Yes. I'm saying it's possible. Human nature is not malleable as the left believes it to be, but it may become malleable. It is under the control of our genes. We may learn how to alter it, and that may be a very long story. It may be that alterations also have great costs, just as political measures have great costs. You know, you bring in one thing, you lose something else. Over some time scale, I'd have to say that we will learn these things, and if people then want to change human nature, they will have the power to do so.

Reason: You say, "If people want to." If *I* choose to change my human nature, that's OK. But already some people with left-leaning tendencies—like *Time*'s Robert Wright—have written that furthering *their* egalitarian project may require that the government offer these genetic technologies to everybody and subsidize their development and use. That scares me because it brings the state back in. And the state has not been very good on eugenics.

Singer: No, it hasn't. But the other option worries me too. You say, "If I change my human nature, that's my business." But in fact it's not likely to be, at least initially, *your* human nature that you change, but the human nature of your offspring. So we have one model, which is basically the free market model, that says, "Those who want to use genetic technology to change the nature of their offspring and can afford to do so may do so. Those who don't, or can't afford to do so, needn't or can't do it." A possible outcome—and I say possible because it depends a little bit on how much it actually does cost and what can be achieved and so on—is that the children of the wealthy will have capacities that will enable them to succeed in life, and the children of the poor won't. So you'll get a society that is more sharply divided than it is today. Already, the wealthy give their children enormous advantages in succeeding in life, but the advantages are such that the idea of equality of opportunity still lingers. Whether it's myth or reality, the expensive prep schools and colleges give scholarships to poor kids, and there is still a sense that if you're bright enough, and you work hard enough at it, you can make it.

If you start to get society dividing into those who have had their genes manipulated in desirable ways and those who haven't, you are actually going to get something that's going to be more like *Brave New World.* That's why various people have said, "Look, if that's what's going to happen, then maybe the government should subsidize these services and enable everyone to have them to some degree." For those societies that already provide health care services to their populations, it's not a big step. They will very likely provide services to eliminate what everyone would agree to be genetic defects and disabilities, so there's going to be the question of whether we should provide some particular kinds of enhancements as well. That is a somewhat nervy prospect. I don't disagree with that. The difference between that and previous government interventions in genetics could be that it's not coercive—that it's an offer of a subsidy. It's not saying "you must have this" or "we'll sterilize you if you don't do this."

Reason: You disagree with the many bioethicists who say that genetic enhancements should not be made available to anybody?

Singer: Certainly it would be premature to reach such a judgment. I think there's nothing in principle wrong with genetic enhancements and, as I say, there may be costs and dangers. It could be seen as a kind of human experimentation, and that has its problems. We talked about the dangers with a divided society. Those are issues that need to be talked about, but I don't think they're a reason for saying that genetic enhancement is per se wrong and ought to be prohibited.

Reason: The chief theme of Darwinism is successful reproduction. Do you see a concordance between your views with regard to the killing of certain defective infants and the Darwinian desire to successfully reproduce?

Singer: You're drawing together somewhat different aspects of my writings. What's probably true is that some of the reaction that people have to the birth of infants with evident disabilities is geneti-

cally coded. That is, for most of human history these infants were unlikely to survive, unlikely to reproduce. Therefore, it was better to not invest in them further: Abandon them and go on with reproduction that can lead to your genes passing on to further generations. I think that's certainly possible. I don't want to say that that makes it good, just as I don't want to say that male dominance being natural makes it good. Given that we now have the possibility of keeping these infants alive, we still need to ask, Well, is that a good thing to do or not a good thing to do, and why?

Reason: Would you require the death of a defective infant because other hypothetical babies would not be born who might lead more fulfilled lives?

Singer: No. My position is that the parents ought to be able to choose this. [Requiring the death of a defective infant] probably wouldn't increase overall happiness, if the parents wanted their child to stay alive. Parent have a very strong desire for their children, so it's hard to imagine.

Reason: But maybe they're wrong. They've misjudged.

Singer: Well, they may be wrong, but if they're going to suffer acutely for a long time over it, it's unlikely I think that the suffering of the child is going to be so great and so impossible to relieve that it will outweigh that. So that's why I would not require it. I could not imagine a society that would function well if it did require that, if it did take that decision from parents. I can imagine some very bizarre cases—if this child really had some condition [such that it] was just going to suffer excruciatingly and the parents nevertheless wanted it kept alive due to religious ideology. I would hope that the doctor would do something so the child didn't live and maybe say to the parents, "Unfortunately it died." But I wouldn't want to make that a matter of general social policy.

Reason: In *A Darwinian Left*, you talk about not withholding insulin from diabetic children. Yet elsewhere you've argued that it would be all right for parents to choose to kill a hemophiliac infant. Nowadays a hemophiliac can take a shot of blood clotting Factor 8 every week and essentially live a normal life. Why did you make that distinction, or does the decision depend on the state of medical technology?

Singer: First, the quote about hemophiliac babies, which is often cited, is something of a misrepresentation. If you look at the actual passage, I am exploring the implications of a particular viewpoint in which nothing's going on except the parents and the child. Having done that, I come back some pages later to say, but when you look at the larger society, if you've got childless couples who would like to adopt a child and hemophilia is not a serious problem, then it's wrong to kill that child if parents really don't want to rear it for some reason. They ought to give it up for adoption. So that's really the kind of thing I'm saying there. But it is also true that when I first wrote that book back in 1979, it wasn't as easy as it is now to treat hemophilia.

Reason: So the moral choices that people make change with advances in technology?

Singer: Yeah. The morality of the situation depends on the consequences of what you're doing. If the consequences of keeping the baby alive are that you have to go to enormous trouble and spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to keep it alive, then that's a morally different choice from if all you have to do is spend $20 a week, or whatever, for the shot.

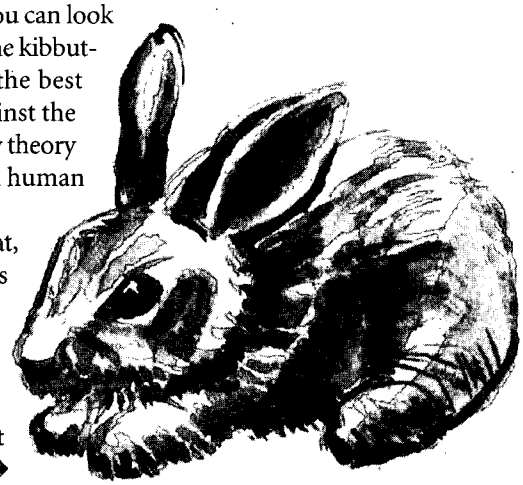
Reason: Is it conceptually possible that capitalist market economies actually lead to the greatest overall happiness of humans than other social arrangements?

Singer: It's conceptually possible, certainly. It's an empirical question as to whether capitalist markets work better in terms of providing greater happiness than any other arrangement.

Reason: What kind of argument would persuade you that it is in fact empirically the case?

Singer: Historical arguments about the failure of alternatives are really powerful here. And it all depends, of course, what you mean by "capitalist markets." Some people mean very unregulated free enterprise systems. Other people would look at the Scandinavian countries or the Netherlands or, more generally, Western and Central Europe, and say they are capitalist economies with more social welfare provisions and that they're doing better. There's a debate that can go on about options, and you can look at different societies and compare them within that existing range. It's a fairly narrow range. Then you can look at the other attempts we talked about earlier: the Soviet sort of models, which really didn't work. You can look at smaller institutions like the kibbutzim too. That's probably the best way to reason about it, against the background of evolutionary theory that helps us to understand human psychology.

I think the evidence is that, within certain limits, things do work better if you let people decide for themselves. The debate is not whether there should be any [economic liberty] but how much.



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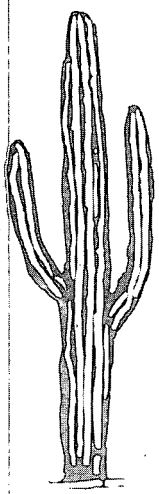
BALLOT TAMPERING

HOW ARIZONA'S ESTABLISHMENT KILLED AN ANTI-TAX INITIATIVE

Arizona residents got a bitter civics lesson last summer. They learned just how far politicians, bureaucrats, corporate lobbyists, and union leaders will go to maintain a status quo that serves them well.

Working on drug policy reform initiatives in 1996 and 1998, I got to know some talented and politically savvy people who shared my opposition to the income tax. We all believed that significant tax reform was no longer possible through normal legislative means because the influence of special interests had led to what journalist Jonathan Rauch aptly calls "demosclerosis." From this core group of activists arose the Taxpayer Protection Alliance, chaired by former Arizona Secretary of State Richard D. Mahoney, now a professor at the American Graduate School of International Management. I ultimately served as the group's



BY JEFFREY A. SINGER

treasurer (Full disclosure: I am also a donor to the Reason Foundation, which publishes REASON.)

In the fall of 1999, the alliance began a campaign to put a voter initiative known as the Taxpayer Protection Act on the November 2000 ballot. The initiative would have phased out all personal and corporate income taxes in Arizona over four years, required voter approval of any tax increases the legislature passed to replace the lost revenue, and allowed candidates for federal office to disclose on ballots their position on repealing the federal income tax.

Even apart from its radical particulars, the Taxpayer Protection Act was striking because of its bipartisan backing and popularity. Mahoney, the chairman, is a self-described Kennedy Democrat. Arizona Treasurer Carol Springer, one of the few elected officials to publicly support the measure, is a proud Reagan Republican. As of June, the Taxpayer Protection Alliance had raised some $300,000, about half coming from Arizona residents. An October 1999 poll conducted by the respected national firm Fairbanks, Maslin, and Maulin showed nearly 2-to-1 support, even when respondents were told that income tax receipts account for nearly half of the state's annual revenue of about $6 billion.

As we started gathering the signatures required to make the ballot, we found ourselves opposed by almost every member of what might be called Arizona's ruling class: politicians, businesspeople, bureaucrats, lobbyists, and union leaders who either rely directly on tax money for income or who benefit from friendly relations with government officials and regulators at the state and local level. Republican Gov. Jane Hull condemned the measure, saying its passage would "close the schools and open the jails." Virtually every state, county, and municipal leader joined the attack. Mayors claimed cities' revenue sharing with the state would disappear.

Teachers unions joined with other public employee unions and a public utilities lobbyist to form Arizonans Against Unfair Tax Schemes, raising about $300,000 through last August to attack the initiative. Eventually, the Arizona Chamber of Commerce joined the opposition. Phoenix sports team owner Jerry Colangelo, whose baseball team, the Diamondbacks, and basketball team, the Suns, play in a taxpayer-funded stadium and arena, agreed to raise money for the opposition. The Arizona news media gave generous coverage to charges by these groups that passage of the Taxpayer Protection Act would bring economic and social catastrophe to the state.

As a result of this backlash, some politicians who initially endorsed the measure withdrew their support. When U.S. Rep. Matt Salmon, a Republican, pulled his backing of the initiative, Gov. Hull proudly took credit for changing his mind. Other early supporters who had pledged financial support reneged, making it clear that their reason was fear of reprisal from Arizona's political and regulatory establishment. At least two developers told Lori Klein, the campaign's executive director, that they had been informed by their "government affairs" people that supporting the initiative would jeopardize relations with important state agencies.

Despite such obstacles, the initiative gained momentum, especially when the Goldwater Institute, a pro-market think tank based in Phoenix, released a study on the economic impact of eliminating the state's income tax. The study, made public in August, was the work of Debra Roubik, a respected independent economist who consults for the state government and many county and municipal governments. Roubik concluded that eliminating the income tax would yield tremendous economic benefits; indeed, she found that the stimulus from repealing the tax would generate enough revenue that, at most, only minimal, short-term increases in other taxes would be needed to achieve "neutrality." Roubik's candor had a price: At a Goldwater Institute forum discussing her findings, she said she had lost a consulting contract with Maricopa County, Arizona's most populous, because of her report.

By the July 7 deadline for inclusion on the November ballot, we had filed 235,000 petition signatures, well above the 152,600 required by law. Based on standard procedure, random sampling of petition signatures qualified the initiative for placement on the ballot. Everything seemed to be falling into place for Arizonans to vote on perhaps the most radical tax reform plan ever put on a state ballot.

The smooth sailing did not last, however. For the first time in recent memory, Arizona Secretary of State Betsey Bayless elected to subject a proposed initiative's petitions to a manual, signature-by-signature count—a process that could last until late October, well after election ballots were to be printed. That meant the Taxpayer Protection Act would be printed on the ballot, but if the official signature count in late October failed to yield the requisite number of verified names, votes on the initiative would not be counted. The Taxpayer Protection Act was the only proposed initiative out of 16 to receive such scrutiny.

Meanwhile, Arizonans Against Unfair Tax Schemes filed a court challenge against the initiative in Maricopa County Superior Court, claiming it violated the "single subject rule" of the Arizona constitution and should therefore be removed from the ballot. The single subject

rule states that "if more than one amendment shall be submitted at any election, such proposed amendments shall be submitted in such a manner that the electors may vote for or against such proposed amendments separately." Arizonans Against Unfair Tax Schemes claimed the Taxpayer Protection Act comprised at least three separate amendments.

On its face, this was a risky legal gamble: The last—and only—time the courts had removed an initiative because of single subject concerns was in 1934. But "Single Subject Fever" began to spread, and three other proposed ballot measures were challenged on the same grounds. Trial courts upheld two of the measures but ordered the Taxpayer Protection Act and the Growing Smarter Plus Initiative, a measure sponsored by the state legislature, off the ballot in early August, finding that they dealt with more than one subject. All four decisions were appealed directly to the state Supreme Court, which agreed to hear them on an expedited basis because of the approaching election.

At least two developers told the campaign's executive director that supporting the anti-tax initiative would jeopardize relations with important state agencies.

The attorney for the Taxpayer Protection Alliance, former state Assistant Attorney General Robert Carey, filed a brief making two basic points. First, he argued that the initiative in fact dealt with only one issue: "an attack on a form of taxation." Second, he argued that even if the initiative ran afoul of the single subject rule, Arizona's constitution merely required that it be placed on the ballot in separated form (a practice common in other states with similar restrictions).

In late August, the Arizona Supreme Court issued its decision on all four contested initiatives through a spokesperson. The Taxpayer Protection Act was ordered off the ballot, while the other three initiatives were given a green light. Strangely, one of the initiatives allowed to go forward was the Growing Smarter Plus Initiative, which raised single subject concerns at least as serious as the Taxpayer Protection Act. Indeed, during legislative hearings on the measure, the legislature's own legal counsel had warned that it might violate the single subject rule.

As I write, the reasoning for the Supreme Court's decision against the Taxpayer Protection Act is unknown. No oral arguments were allowed, and no written opinion has been issued—just a one-sentence affirmation of the superior court's ruling and a promise that "a formal opinion of the court will follow in due course." The order, signed by Chief Justice Thomas A. Zlaket, did not even indicate which justices had heard the case.

In a press release, Arizona Treasurer Carol Springer condemned the removal of the Taxpayer Protection Act from the ballot, calling it "a blatantly political decision [that] unnecessarily narrowed the single-subject requirement....This new definition was not equally applied to all propositions, clearly shown by the court allowing [the Growing Smarter Plus Initiative] to remain on the ballot."

The Taxpayer Protection Act's opponents cheered the decision. A spokesperson for Gov. Hull expressed relief that the court had barred the initiative from the ballot, saying its passage would have been "harmful" to Arizona. Hull has also called for revisions in the state's ballot initiative laws that would make it more difficult for citizens (though not the legislature) to place questions on the ballot.

A legacy of the Progressive Era in American politics, the initiative process was designed as a means by which voters could bypass the political establishment and directly enact reforms. The Taxpayer Protection Act was very much in that spirit. In attempting to repeal personal and corporate income taxes, the initiative sought to constrain one of government's most basic tools of power. While it's unclear whether the proposition actually would have won on election day, this much seems certain: Arizona voters have already lost something important by being denied the opportunity to cast a ballot on the matter.

Jeffrey A. Singer (dr4liberty@aol.com) is a Phoenix-area surgeon.

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Movers & Shakers

How immigrants are reviving neighborhoods given up for dead

For decades the industrial area just east of downtown Los Angeles was an economic wreck, a 15-square-block area inhabited largely by pre–World War II derelict buildings. Yet now the area comes to life every morning, full of talk of toys in various South China dialects, in Vietnamese, in Korean, in Farsi, in Spanish, and in the myriad other commercial languages of the central city.

The district now known as Toytown represents a remarkable turnaround of the kind of archaic industrial area that has fallen into disuse all across the country. A combination of largely immigrant entrepreneurship and the fostering of a specialized commercial district has created a bustling marketplace that employs over 4,000 people, boasts revenues estimated at roughly $500 million a year, and controls the distribution of roughly 60 percent of the $12 billion in toys sold to American retailers.

"In December we have about the worst traffic problem in downtown," proudly asserts Charlie Woo, a 47-year-old immigrant who arrived in 1968 from Hong Kong and is widely considered the district's founding father. During the holiday season, thousands of retail customers, mostly Latino, come down to the district seeking cut-rate toys, dolls, and action figures, including dubious knockoffs of better-known brands. For much of the rest of the year, the district

By Joel Kotkin

sustains itself as a global wholesale center for customers from Latin America and Mexico, which represent nearly half the area's shipments, as well as buyers from throughout the United States.

Few in L.A.'s business world, City Hall, or the Community Redevelopment Agency paid much attention when Woo started his family's first toy wholesaling business in 1979. "When Toytown started, the CRA didn't even know about it," recalls Don Spivack, now the agency's deputy administrator. "It happened on its own. It was a dead warehouse district."

How dead? Dave Zoraster, an appraiser at CB Richard Ellis, estimates that in the mid-1970s land values in the area—then known only as Central City East—stood at $2.75 a square foot, a fraction of the over $100 a square foot the same property commands today. Vacancy rates, now in the single digits, then hovered at around 50 percent. For the most part, Spivack recalls, development officials saw the district as a convenient place to cluster the low-income, largely transient population a safe distance from the city's new sparkling high-rises nearby.

To Charlie Woo, then working on a Ph.D. in physics at UCLA, the low land costs in the area presented an enormous opportunity. Purchasing his first building for a mere $140,000, Woo saw the downtown location as a cheap central locale for wholesaling and distributing the billions of dollars in toys unpacked at the massive twin ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles, the nation's dominant hub for U.S.-Asia trade and the world's third-largest container port. Woo's *guanxi*, or connections, helped him establish close relationships with scores of toy manufacturers in Asia, where the vast majority of the nation's toys are produced. The large volume of toys he imported then allowed him to take a 20 percent margin, compared with the 40 to 50 percent margins sought by the traditional small toy wholesalers. Today Woo and his family own 10 buildings, with roughly 70 tenants, in the area; their distribution company, Megatoys, has annual sales in excess of $30 million.

"Immigrants are hungrier and more optimistic," says Harvard's William Apgar. "Their presence is the difference between New York and Detroit."

Toytown's success also has contributed to a broader growth in toy-related activity in Southern California. The region—home to Mattel, the world's largest toy maker—has spawned hundreds of smaller toy-making firms, design firms, and distribution firms, some originally located in Toytown but now residing in sleek modern industrial parks just outside the central core. Other spin-offs, including a new toy design department at the Otis College of Art and Design in West Los Angeles and the Toy Association of Southern California, have worked to secure the region's role as a major industry hub.

Woo envisions Toytown as a retail center. But whatever its future, the district's continuing success stands as testament to the ability of immigrant entrepreneurs and specialized industrial districts to turn even the most destitute urban neighborhoods around. Woo notes: "The future of Toytown will be as a gathering point for anyone interested in toys. Designers and buyers will come to see what's selling, what the customer wants. The industry will grow all over, but this place will remain ground zero."

For much of the 19th and early 20th centuries, immigrants filled and often dominated American cities. With the curtailment of immigration in the 1920s, this flow was dramatically reduced, and urban areas began to suffer demographic stagnation, and in some places rapid decline. Only after 1965, when immigration laws were reformed, did newcomers return in large numbers, once again transforming many of the nation's cities.

This was critical, because despite the movement of young professionals and others into the urban core, native-born Americans continued, on balance, to flee the cities in the 1990s. Only two of the nation's 10 largest metropolitan areas, Houston and Dallas, gained domestic migrants in the decade. As over 2.5 million native-born Americans fled the nation's densest cities, over 2.3 million immigrants came in.

The impacts were greatest in five major cities: New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Miami, and Chicago. These cities received more than half of the estimated 20 million legal and 3 million to 5 million illegal immigrants who arrived over the past quarter century. Without these immigrants, probably all these cities would have suffered the sort of serious depopulation that has afflicted such cities as St. Louis, Baltimore, and Detroit, which until recently have attracted relatively few foreigners.

In this two-way population flow, America's major cities and their close suburbs have become ever more demographically distinct from the rest of the country. In 1930, one out of four residents of the top four "gateway" cities came from abroad, twice the national average; by the 1990s, one in three was foreign-born, five times the norm. Fully half of all new Hispanic residents in the country between 1990 and 1996 resided in the 10 largest cities. Asians are even more concentrated, with roughly two in five residing in just three areas:

Los Angeles, New York, and San Francisco.

In places such as Southern California, immigration has transformed the economic landscape. Between 1992 and 1999, the number of Latino businesses in Los Angeles County more than doubled. Some of these businesses have grown in areas that previously had been considered fallow, such as Compton and South-Central Los Angeles. In these long-established "ghettos," both incomes and population have been on the rise largely because of Latino immigration, after decades of decline.

A similar immigrant-driven phenomenon has sparked recoveries in some of the nation's most distressed neighborhoods, from Washington, D.C., to Houston. Along Pitkin Avenue in Brooklyn's Brownsville section, Caribbean and African immigrants, who have a rate of self-employment 20 to 50 percent higher than that of native-born blacks, have propelled a modest but sustained economic expansion.

The recovery of such once forlorn places stems largely from the culture of these new immigrants. Certainly Brooklyn's infrastructure and location remain the same as in its long decades of decline. Along with entrepreneurship, the newcomers from places such as the Caribbean have brought with them a strong family ethic, a system of mutual financial assistance called *susus*, and a more positive orientation to their new place. "Immigrants are hungrier and more optimistic," notes William Apgar of Harvard's Joint Center for Housing Studies. "Their upward mobility is a form of energy. Their presence is the difference between New York and Detroit."

It is possible that newcomers to America might even be able to revive those cities that have not yet fully felt the transformative power of immigration. A possible harbinger can be seen on the South Side of St. Louis, a city largely left out of the post-1970s immigrant wave. Once a thriving white working-class community, the area, like much of the rest of the city, had suffered massive depopulation and economic stagnation.

This began to change, however, in the late 1990s, with the movement into the area of an estimated 10,000 Bosnian refugees, along with other newcomers, including Somalis, Vietnamese, and Mexicans. Southern Commercial Bank loan officer Steve Hrdlicka, himself a native of the district, recalls: "Eight years ago, when we opened this branch, we sat on our hands most of the time. We used to sleep quite a lot. Then this place became a rallying place for Bosnians. They would come in and ask for a loan for furniture. Then it was a car. Then it was a house, for themselves, their cousins."

In 1998, largely because of the Bosnians, Hrdlicka's branch, located in a South St. Louis neighborhood called Bevo, opened more new accounts than any of the 108-year-old Southern Commercial's other six branches. Over the last two years of the 1990s, the newcomers, who have developed a reputation for hard work and thrift, helped push the number of accounts at the branch up nearly 80 percent, while deposits have nearly doubled to $40 million.

"Bosnians," says one immigrant, "don't care if they start by buying the smallest, ugliest house. At least they feel they have something."

A translator at the Bevo branch, 25-year-old Jasna Mruckovski, has even cashed in on the Bosnians' homebuying tendencies. Moonlighting as a real estate salesperson, she has helped sell 33 homes in the area over the past year, all but one to Bosnian buyers. In many cases, she notes, these homes were bought with wages pooled from several family members, including children. Mruckovski, a refugee from Banjo Luka who arrived in St. Louis in 1994, observes: "St. Louis is seen as a cheap place to live. People come from California, Chicago, and Florida, where it's more expensive. Bosnians don't care if they start by buying the smallest, ugliest house. At least they feel they have something. This feeling is what turns a place like this around."

Immigration also helps cities retain their preeminence in another traditional urban economic bastion: cross-cultural trade. Virtually all the great cities since antiquity derived much of their sustenance through the intense contact between differing peoples in various sorts of markets. As world economies have developed through the ages, exchanges between races and cultures have been critical to establishing the geographic importance of particular places. Historian Fernand Braudel suggests, "A world economy always has an urban center of gravity, a city, as the logistic heart of its activity. News, merchandise, capital, credit, people, instructions, correspondence all flow into and out of the city. Its powerful merchants lay down the law, sometimes becoming extraordinarily wealthy."

Repeatedly throughout history, it has been outsiders—immigrants—who have driven cross-cultural exchange. "Throughout the history of economics," observes social theorist Georg Simmel, "the stranger appears as the trader, or the trader as stranger." In ancient Greece, for example, it was *metics*, largely foreigners, who drove the marketplace economy disdained by

most well-born Greeks. In Alexandria, Rome, Venice, and Amsterdam—as well as the Islamic Middle East—this pattern repeated itself, with "the stranger" serving the critical role as intermediary.

As in Renaissance Venice and early modern Amsterdam or London, the increasing ethnic diversity of America's cities plays a critical role in their domination of international trade. Over the past 30 years, cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Houston, Chicago, and Miami have become ever more multiethnic, with many of the newcomers hailing from growing trade regions such as East Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America. The large immigrant clusters in these cities help forge critical global economic ties, held together not only by commercial bonds but by the equally critical bonds of cultural exchange and kinship networks.

As in Renaissance Venice, the increasing ethnic diversity of America's cities plays a critical role in their domination of international trade.

These newcomers have redefined some former backwaters into global trading centers. Miami's large Latino population —including 650,000 Cubans, 75,000 Nicaraguans, and 65,000 Colombians—has helped turn the one-time sun-and-fun capital into the dominant center for American trade and travel to South America and the Caribbean. Modesto Maidique, president of Florida International University, who is himself a Cuban émigré, observes: "If you take away international trade and cultural ties from Miami, we go back to being just a seasonal tourist destination. It's the imports, the exports, and the service trade that have catapulted us into the first rank of cities in the world."

Like the *souk* districts of the Middle East, diversified cities provide an ideal place for the creation of unique, globally oriented markets. These *souks*, which are fully operational to this day, are home mostly to small, specialized merchants. In most cases, the districts consist of tiny unlighted shops raised two or three feet from street level. Stores are often grouped together by trade, allowing the consumer the widest selection and choice.

The emergence of the Western *souk* is perhaps most evident in Los Angeles, home to Toytown. Within a short distance of that bustling district are scores of other specialized districts —the downtown Fashion Mart, the Flower District, and the jewelry, food, and produce districts are crowded with shoppers, hustlers, and buyers of every possible description. These districts' vitality contrasts with the longstanding weakness of downtown L.A.'s office market, which has been losing companies and tenants to other parts of the city.

Similar trade-oriented districts have arisen in other cities, such as along Canal Street in New York, in the "Asia Trade District" along Dallas's Harry Hines Boulevard, and along the Harwin Corridor in the area outside the 610 Loop in Houston. Once a forlorn strip of office and warehouse buildings, the Harwin area has been transformed into a car-accessed *souk* for off-price goods for much of East Texas, featuring cut-rate furniture, novelties, luggage, car parts, and electronic goods.

These shops, owned largely by Chinese, Korean, and Indian merchants, have grown from roughly 40 a decade ago to more than 800, sparking a boom in a once-depressed real estate market. Over the decade, the value of commercial properties in the district has more than tripled, and vacancies have dropped from nearly 50 percent to single digits. "It's kind of an Asian frontier sprawl around here," comments David Wu, a prominent local store owner.

Indeed, few American cities have been more transformed by trade and immigration than Houston. With the collapse of energy prices in the early 1980s, the once booming Texas metropolis appeared to be on the road to economic oblivion. Yet the city has rebounded, in large part because of the very demographic and trade patterns seen in the other Sun Belt capitals. "The energy industry totally dominated Houston by the 1970s—after all, oil has been at the core of our economy since 1901," explains University of Houston economist Barton Smith. "Every boom leads people to forget other parts of the economy. After the bust, people saw the importance of the ports and trade."

Since 1986, tonnage through the 25-mile-long Port of Houston has grown by one-third, helping the city recover the jobs lost during the "oil bust" of the early 1980s. Today, Smith estimates, trade accounts for roughly 10 percent of regional employment and has played a critical role in the region's 1990s recovery: By 1999 a city once renowned for its plethora of "see-through" buildings ranked second in the nation in total office space absorption and third in rent increases.

Immigrants were the critical factor in this turnaround. Between 1985 and 1990, Houston, a traditional magnet for domestic migrants, suffered a net loss of over 140,000 native-born residents. But the immigrants kept coming—nearly 200,000 over the past decade, putting the Texas town among America's seven most popular immigrant destinations.

Among those coming to Houston during the 1970s boom was a Taiwan-born engineer named Don Wang, who in 1987 founded his own immigrant-oriented financial institution, Metrobank. Amid the hard times and demographic shifts,

Wang and his clients—largely Asian, Latin, and African immigrants—saw an enormous opportunity to pick up real estate, buy homes, and start businesses. Minority-owned enterprises now account for nearly 30 percent of Houston's business community.

Says Wang: "In the 1980s everyone was giving up on Houston. But we stayed. It was cheap to start a business here and easy to find good labor. We considered this the best place to do business in the country, even if no one on the outside knows it....When the oil crisis came, everything dropped, but it actually was our chance to become a new city again."

The melting pot has spilled into the suburbs. About 51 percent of Asians, 43 percent of Latinos, and 32 percent of African Americans live in the suburbs.

Increasingly, the focus of immigrants—and their enterprise—extends beyond the traditional *souk* economy to a broader part of the metropolitan geography. Most dramatic has been the movement to the older rings of suburbs, which are rapidly replacing the inner city as the predominant melting pots of American society. This trend can be seen across the nation, from the Chinese- and Latino-dominated suburbs east of Los Angeles to the new immigrant communities emerging in southern metropolitan areas such as Houston, Dallas, and Atlanta. This move marks a sharp contrast to the immediate postwar era, when these suburbs, like their high-tech workforces, remained highly segregated.

The demographic shift in the near suburbs started in the 1970s, when African-Americans began moving to them in large numbers. In the ensuing two decades, middle-class minorities and upwardly mobile recent immigrants have shown a marked tendency to replace whites in the suburbs, particularly in the inner ring, increasing their numbers far more rapidly than their Anglo counterparts. Today nearly 51 percent of Asians, 43 percent of Latinos, and 32 percent of African Americans live in the suburbs.

This development is particularly notable in those regions where immigration has been heaviest. Among the most heavily Asian counties in the nation are such places as Queens County in New York, Santa Clara and San Mateo counties in Northern California, and Orange County, south of Los Angeles. Queens and Fort Bend County, in suburban Houston, rank among the 10 most ethnically diverse counties in the nation.

Today these areas have become as ethnically distinctive as the traditional inner cities themselves, if not more so. Some, like Coral Gables, outside of Miami, have become both ethnic and global business centers. Coral Gables is home to the Latin American division headquarters of over 50 multinationals.

Other places, such as the San Gabriel Valley east of Los Angeles, have accommodated two distinct waves of ethnic settlement, Latino and Asian. Cities such as Monterey Park, Alhambra, and San Gabriel have become increasingly Asian in character; areas such as Whittier and La Puente have been transformed by Latino migration. Yet in both cases, the movement is predominantly by middle-class homeowners. "For us this isn't a dream, this is reality," notes Frank Corona, who moved to the area from East Los Angeles. "This is a quiet, nice, family-oriented community."

The reason the melting pot has spilled into the suburbs lies in the changing needs of immigrants. In contrast to the early 20th century, when proximity to inner-city services and infrastructure was critical, many of today's newcomers to a more dispersed, auto-oriented society find they need to stop only briefly, if at all, in the inner cities. Their immediate destination after arrival is as likely to be Fort Lee as Manhattan, the San Gabriel Valley as Chinatown or the East L.A. barrios. Notes Cal State Northridge demographer James Allen: "The immigrants often don't bother with the inner city anymore. Most Iranians don't ever go to the center city, and few Chinese ever touch Chinatown at all. Many of them want to get away from poor people as soon as possible."

As proof, Allen points to changes in his own community, the San Fernando Valley, which for a generation was seen as the epitome of the modern suburb. In the 1960s, the valley was roughly 90 percent white; three decades later it was already 44 percent minority, with Latinos representing nearly one-third the total population. By 1997, according to county estimates, Latinos were roughly 41 percent of the valley population, while Asians were another 9 percent.

Similarly dramatic changes have taken place outside of California. Twenty years ago, Queens County was New York's largest middle-class and working-class white bastion, the fictional locale of the small homeowner Archie Bunker. Today it is not Manhattan, the legendary immigrant center, but Queens that is easily the most diverse borough in New York, with thriving Asian, Latino, and middle-class African-American neighborhoods. Over 40 percent of the borough's businesses are now minority-owned, almost twice as high as the percentage in Manhattan.

This alteration in the suburban fabric is particularly marked in the American South, which largely lacks the infrastructure of established ethnic inner-city districts. Regions such as Atlanta experienced some of the most rapid growth in immigration in the last two decades of the millennium; between 1970 and 1990, for example, Georgia's immigrant population grew by 525 percent. By 1996, over 11.5 million Asians lived in the South. Yet since most Southern cities lacked the preexisting structure of an ethnic Asian or Latino community to embrace the newcomers, most new immigrants chose to cluster not in the central city but in the near suburbs.

"Well, we still have one fried-chicken place left somewhere around here," jokes Houston architect Chao-Chiung Lee over dim sum in one of the city's heavily Asian suburbs. "It's kind of the last outpost of the native culture lost amid the new Chinatown."

No longer "lily white" enclaves, suburbs must draw their strength, as the great cities before them did, from their increasingly diverse populations.

Yet if the successes of immigrants represent the success of the melting pot, the demographic shift also presents some potential challenges. In addition to a swelling number of entrepreneurs and scientists, there has been a rapid expansion of a less-educated population. For example, Latinos, the fastest-growing group in Silicon Valley, account for 23 percent of that region's population but barely 7 percent of its high-tech work force. Part of the problem lies with education: Only 56 percent of Latinos graduate from high school, and less than one in five takes the classes necessary to get into college.

Indeed, as the economy becomes increasingly information-based, there are growing concerns among industry and political leaders that many of the new immigrants and, more important, their children may be unprepared for the kind of jobs that are opening up in the future. Immigrants may be willing to serve as bed changers, gardeners, and service workers for the digital elites, but there remains a serious question as to whether their children will accept long-term employment in such generally low-paid and low-status niches.

George Borjas, a leading critic of U.S. immigration policy and professor of public policy at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government, suggests that recent immigration laws have tilted the pool of newcomers away from skilled workers toward those less skilled, seriously depleting the quality of the labor pool and perhaps threatening the social stability of the immigration centers. "The national economy is demanding more skilled workers," Borjas says, "and I don't see how bringing more unskilled workers is consistent with this trend....When you have a very large group of unskilled workers, and children of unskilled workers, you risk the danger of creating a social underclass in the next [21st] century."

In the coming decades, this disconnect between the labor force and the economy in some areas could lead to an exodus of middle-class people and businesses to less troubled places, as happened previously in inner cities. Across the country, many aging suburbs, such as Upper Darby near Philadelphia and Harvey outside Chicago, are well on the way to becoming highly diverse suburban slums as businesses move farther out into the geographic periphery. Others—in regions including Boston, New Orleans, Cleveland, St. Louis, Dallas, and Indianapolis—now struggle to retain their attractiveness.

If unchecked, a broader ghettoization looms as a distinct possibility, particularly in some of the older areas filled with smaller houses and more mundane apartment buildings. These areas could become —as have some suburbs of Paris—dysfunctional, balkanized losers in the new digital geography. "It's a different place now. We can go either way," says Robert Scott, a former L.A. planning commissioner and leader of the San Fernando Valley's drive to secede from Los Angeles.

Scott grew up in the once all-white, now predominantly Latino community of Van Nuys. "The valley can become a storehouse of poverty and disenchantment," he says, "or it can become a series of neighborhoods with a sense of uniqueness and an investment in its future." As Scott suggests, for these new melting pots, the best course may be not so much to try clinging to their demographic past as to find a way to seize the advantages of their more diverse roles, both economically and demographically. No longer "lily white" enclaves, such communities increasingly must draw their strength, as the great cities before them did, from the energies, skills, and cultural offerings of their increasingly diverse populations. ◆

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SOME OF THE 2000 REASONS WHY YOU NEED NR IN 2000

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ELECTION-YEAR BALANCE

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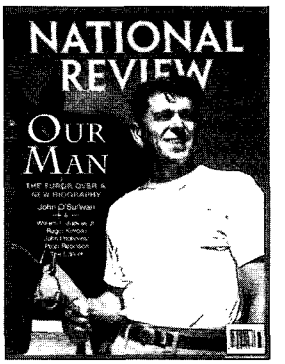

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Feed His Head

REASON's presidential reading list

At press time, it's far from clear just who will win the presidential election. Only this much is certain: Whoever becomes the next chief executive is going to need help—lots of it—understanding what's going on, both with traditional public policy concerns and with other areas of activity. With that in mind, REASON asked various experts to identify a topic worthy of presidential attention and to recommend three must-read books on the issue. The only restrictions: One of the books must be a work of creative literature and one must have been written within the past decade.

Numbers Rackets

By Jodie T. Allen

Charm and sensitivity may propel a man to the White House, but sooner or later a president will have to face the challenge of juggling numbers—means, percentages, and oh so much more. Stymieing one's critics won't be hard, because the public—office-holding and otherwise—isn't particularly numerate. But it will take some practice. Here are some books that can help the president spin his way around the bottom line.

A Mathematician Reads the Newspaper (1995), by John Allen Paulos, is basically a "feel good" read for any president since the author blames reporters and editors for the misleading data and statistics that routinely appear in the media. A president will realize, of course, that the media are by and large merely unwitting, if gullible, conduits for the misinformation passed on to them by politicians, businessmen, and flacks, but you may pick up useful pointers on just what sort of lies sell best.

Darrell Huff's *How to Lie With Statistics* (1954) is the prototext for would-be manipulators of the public mind. The book was handily updated for 1993's paperback edition, with all the latest tips for shifting bases, truncating graphs, citing numbers when percents are more revealing (or vice versa), and a hundred other tips for authoritative dissembling. The tricks aren't new but they have stood the test of time.

Finally, there's *Godel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* (1979), by Douglas R. Hofstadter. Not exactly a novel, this Pulitzer Prize winner is surely one of the great flights of mathematical fancy. In fact, the paperback cover proclaims the work to be "a metaphorical fugue" done "in the spirit of Lewis Carroll." Why does a president need a fugue? Well, every leader needs a tome to keep by the bedside in case some prying reporter inquires as to his or her current reading matter. What is wanted is a book that will stand the test of time; i.e., that no normal person has ever truly finished. (*A Brief History of Time* and *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* are obvious but overworked alternatives.) It is also essential that the subject matter be such that virtually no reporter or pundit can frame an intelligent question about its contents or the lessons you have drawn from it. Books about Dean Acheson are, for example, a poor choice in this regard; stick with fugues is my advice.

Jodie T. Allen is business and technology editor of U.S. News & World Report.

Stocks and Stones

By Joey Anuff

The next president ought to understand the stock market. Why? As Willie Sutton said in a slightly different context: Because that's where the money is.

Fred Schwed Jr.'s 1940 tome *Where Are the Customers' Yachts? or A Good Hard Look at Wall Street* is a good place to start. Schwed, who traded professionally during the stock market crash of 1929 and on through the Great Depression (and eventually became a children's book author) can be rightfully credited with having written the funniest book about the American stock market, mostly due to his expert ability to recognize the confluence of greed, ignorance, and pants-fouling terror that drives market speculation. Our nation's next CEO would be well-advised to familiarize himself with Schwed's useful maxim on the psychology of market disaster: "While hundreds of thousands are being plunged into poverty only the thoughtful ask, 'What is happening to us?' The popular cry is 'Who is doing this to us?' and its satisfying sequel—'Just let me get my hands on him!'" When Priceline.com gets delisted by the Nasdaq, staying attuned to this kind of thinking will guarantee an '04 reelection sweep.

DARREN GYGI

Another useful reference work, for both the next POTUS and anyone angling toward a position of absolute power, is former Van Halen frontman David Lee Roth's thoughtful autobiography, *Crazy From the Heat* (1998). Roth would be the last to claim for himself special insight into the woozy world of high finance—Van Halen's infamous $100,000-per-minute fee for the 1982 US festival notwithstanding. But like Sun Tzu mots in the boardroom, Roth's crotch-centric wisdom is as well-suited to the Oval Office as it is to the floor of the NYSE: "You've got to understand, rock 'n' roll is a lot like God took the map of the United States and tilted it, and everybody loose and unscrewed down rolled into my business." Substitute "the markets" for "rock 'n' roll" (hey, everybody else has) and you end up with as good an understanding of your role as figurehead for the U.S. economy as anything you'd find scrawled on the wall of the presidential bathroom stall.

Finally, I'd suggest an indiscriminate reading of just about any Batman comic book from the 1940s until the present. (The movies are OK, too.) Bruce Wayne is this guy with loads of money, a pre-Internet billionaire with a private jet and a personal cave. But he's not content simply to be a powerful influence on the economy. He cares about social issues, such as crime. But while Wayne is a great philanthropist, the past 60 years have taught him that it's not always enough to use his economic weight to rid the world of the problems he sees plaguing it. Sometimes other tools yield more effective—and more undeniably satisfying—results: tools like a batarang, for example, or his fist. Batman's long-lasting and continual cultural heft indicates that Americans admire, however wisely or unwisely, someone who recognizes the necessity of a swift kick to the nuts, in matters economic, social, and otherwise.

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Really Long-Term Health Care

By Ronald Bailey

"I don't want to be immortal through my work. I want to be immortal through not dying," Woody Allen once quipped. The biomedical breakthroughs that might make Allen's wish more than an amusing aphorism are coming fast and furiously. They also raise a question worth pondering: What's more important, "saving" Social Security or increasing human lifespans, thus making such programs irrelevant and obsolete?

To understand how to nurture this coming biomedical revolution, the president should read *From Alchemy to IPO: The Business of Biotechnology,* by Cynthia Robbins-Roth (2000). If he really wants to cut the costs of medical treatments, the most important thing the president can do is let pharmaceutical and biotech companies continue their breakneck pace of research and innovation with as little interference as possible. Pandering to seniors by promising them cut-rate drugs today means that new, more effective, and perhaps even cheaper therapies will be delayed—if not stopped entirely tomorrow.

"The next president ought to understand the stock market. Why? As Willie Sutton said in a slightly different context: Because that's where the money is."

—Joey Anuff

For ethical guidance on the new technologies, he should turn to H. Tristam Engelhardt's *The Foundations of Bioethics* (1986, revised 1996). Engelhardt's book is a bit recondite, but a central point is that in our pluralistic society there is no one set of values that can be applied to evaluating and using new technologies. The moral thing to do is to let each citizen and family decide for themselves whether and how to use new treatments involving stem cells, gene therapy, genetic diagnostics, pre-implantation embryo testing, and so forth.

For a look at the longer-term future, the president might put Ben Bova's *Immortality: How Science is Extending Your Lifespan and Changing the World* (1998) on his nightstand. "The first immortals are already living among us. You might be one of them," Bova audaciously declares. He argues that within the next 50 years, biotech researchers may well find the cure to aging. Who then will care whether Social Security is in a "lock box" or a paper shopping bag? And here's a novel the president can spend time with in his long retirement: *Holy Fire* (1996), by science fiction master Bruce Sterling. *Holy Fire* is a speculative and insightful story that explores how anti-aging technologies may affect scoiety.

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Humanitarian Non-Intervention

By Ted Galen Carpenter

Absent a major international crisis (such as the Iranian hostage episode in 1980) or a failing war (Korea in 1952, Vietnam in 1968), foreign policy rarely plays a significant role in a presidential election. Yet the Constitution makes it clear that the president's principal job is to direct the nation's foreign policy. Moreover, the importance of the topic eclipses that of virtually any domestic issue. If a president blunders at home, tax dollars may be wasted and citizens may find their liberty constrained. If a president blunders in his foreign policy, innocent people may perish by the thousands or millions.

The incoming chief executive would be wise to read David Chandler's *Bosnia: Faking Democracy after Dayton* (1999). Chandler's detailed account of the West's nation-building effort in Bosnia following the 1995 Dayton Accords confirms Lord Acton's observation that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. An army of foreign bureaucrats backed by NATO troops runs Bosnia as an international colony. Media outlets are heavily censored, candidates that U.N. or NATO officials deem uncooperative are barred from the ballot, and elected officials who dare defy the colonists' increasingly au-

thoritarian policies are simply removed from office. Chandler's book is a powerful rebuttal to those who say the U.S. should embark on more "humanitarian" military interventions and nation-building missions.

The president should also read Doug Bandow's *Tripwire: Korea and U.S. Foreign Policy in a Changed World* (1996). Bandow's analysis shows that what Milton and Rose Friedman called the "tyranny of the status quo" is at work in foreign as well as domestic policy. America's military commitment to South Korea, established a half-century ago during the Korean War, persists despite vastly changed conditions in East Asia. Once weak, impoverished, and incapable of defending itself, South Korea now has twice the population of North Korea and an economy 30 times as large. Yet it remains a U.S. security dependent.

Finally, the new president should read a troubling novel, *Dragon Strike*, by Humphrey Hawksley and Simon Holberton (1997). Despite some all-too-trendy China-bashing, the book does a good job of showing how Washington's East Asian security commitments could easily embroil the United States in a major war against a nuclear-armed great power. Any occupant of the White House should ponder the wisdom of a policy that might lead to such a catastrophic outcome.

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Alt.cult Cults

By Tim Cavanaugh

The next president should have some understanding of alternative media, a statement that conjures up dismaying visions of George W. or Albert Jr. leafing through some loser's zine about Italian splatter films. Further complicating matters is the ontological chestnut about whether forms of "alternative" media that haven't been "co-opted" by the "Culture Industry" can even exist. If Dubya digs into *Motorbooty*, the infamous Detroit-based pop-cult zine, can there be meaningful dissent? If Gore gets jiggy with the latest issue of the hip-hop magazine *Vibe*, is he making contact with a vibrant urban culture or aiding and abetting a bunch of corporate sellouts?

Why alternative media? The arguments and ideas put forth there are important precisely because they represent perspectives very much left out of mainstream thinking. As it happens, and for better or worse, the literature that can currently most believably lay claim to the "alternative" title is the growing crop of anti-globalization books, magazines, and Web sites. Here are three representative sources, from the left, the right, and the Great Beyond.

"Sooner or later, every president has a scandal on his hands. There are a *lot* of books on the subject, though the Clinton years have rendered the library obsolete."

—Charles Paul Freund

Whatever you may think of anti–World Trade Organization protests in the world's second cities, you've got to admire the organizational capacities of San Francisco–based Global Exchange. The human rights group takes up the cases of Zapatistas and Haitian progressives against the unelected elites they say are masterminding the New World Order of Trade. While the logic and rhetoric are frequently sub-Ciceronian, any of the reading materials to be found at globalexchange.org—from Sandalista travelogues to anti-capitalist agitprop—will at least offer the president a wistful look back on dear college days.

It's a sign of, well, something that the new left's closest philosophical relatives can be found among America's most venerable right-wing kooks. Sure, you won't find many vegans fighting gun laws or trying to get the Panama Canal back, but when *The New American*, the official magazine of the John Birch Society, starts harping about those World Economic Forum meetings in Davos, Switzerland, the extremes come within sight of each other. To the extent that it can ever endorse the actions of long-haired freaks, *The New American*, available on the Web at thenewamerican.com, has actually been fairly sympathetic to this year's globo-protesters.

The Birchers, of course, see the WTO as merely one step in the long, slow march toward World Government, and as the magazine is fond of pointing out, the idea of global trade, regulation, and law has worked its way from fringe media to the mainstream. But when it's ABC or CNN doing the talking, none dare call it treason.

And did you know that Satanism is on the rise in Russia? That cross-dressing priests are among the masterminds of the tragedies in Bosnia and Kosovo? That the Vatican is ignoring an anti-Catholic holocaust in China? That Perestroika itself was all a trick to put us off our guards so that the You Know Whos can continue to call the shots from inside the Kremlin? You would if you had been reading *The Fatima Crusader* (fatima.org), whose tissue of calls for the consecration of Russia and rants against the Godless United Nations bring together two great tastes—fringe Catholicism and religious anti-globalism. If nothing else, the news that Old Scratch is being worshiped in the Vatican should encourage even devout Catholics to re-examine the wisdom of taking marching orders from a Roman dictator.

Close observers may carp that the above selections do not contain a fiction selection. Those of us who are Catholic are bound by papal order to believe everything we read in *The Fatima Crusader*, so we'd argue that the utopian depictions of Cuban collective farms at Global Exchange and the vision of an idyllic pre-U.N. United States in *The New American* are sufficiently unrelated to reality to qualify as the very best in modern fiction. But the larger issues (if not the actual treatments) raised in all three publications—opposition to the erosion of individual rights, calls for greater local sovereignty, and attacks against rule by all forms of self-appointed experts—are something that we hope our next president will take seriously when it

comes time to act. Or even better, not to act.

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Scandology

By Charles Paul Freund

Sooner or later, every president has a scandal on his hands. As it happens, there are a *lot* of books on the subject, though eight unremitting years of Bill Clinton have rendered the whole library obsolete. (Best quick study on Clinton's presidency: Christopher Hitchens' 1999 book *No One Left to Lie To.*) Still, it's a good idea to bring some perspective to the matter. Upon winning the White House, every president should have a staffer read the following and give a terse executive summary first thing in the morning.

An academic view of scandology is offered in *The Politics of Scandal: Power and Process in Liberal Democracies* (1988), edited by Andrei S. Markovits and Mark Silverstein. This work is not exactly Washington Babylon; rather, it's the sort of work that schematizes scandal abstractly. Figure 1.1, for example, offers an overlap of circles marked "The logic of power" and "The logic of due process." Locate yourself on that page, and you're ready to lead.

Prefer something more practical? Try *Responses of the Presidents to Charges of Misconduct* (1974). This genuinely fascinating work, covering every chief executive from George Washington to LBJ, was prepared at the behest of the House Judiciary Committee as its members pondered the impeachment case against Richard Nixon. Scandal is what presidents make of them; here's two centuries worth, and how they looked from Ground Zero. (This work was never intended to be commercially published, but never mind that now. Scandal begets scandal, even at this level.)

It makes sense to relax with an executive summary of a novel on the subject, too. Check out *Treason in the White House* (1994), by Torin K. Andrews and Judith A. Hruz. It deals with "a draft-dodging American student at Oxford" who becomes a president with a secret agenda, until he is found out and hanged on the Mall. This book is no *Advise and Consent*, but what it may lack in literary merit it makes up for as a cautionary artifact, along with—so far—*Primary Colors* and *Wag the Dog.* A president may be able to control his scandological problems, but his cultural legacy has a life of its own.

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Techno-Upheaval

By Joel Garreau

If the president is interested in staying ahead of history's curve, he might pause to consider the social effects of technological change. The '90s may have been the Internet decade, but they were a real social snooze: peace, prosperity, and Monica. Maybe the decade just past is comparable to the 1920s and 1950s, periods of significant technological advance that also seemed socially and politically quiescent, but which were followed by decades of upheaval. If there's a lag time to the human consequences of technological change, the '00s could be an interesting time.

"Figuring out what globalization means is the central challenge of international economic policy in our era. The new president won't be able to get away from it."

—Brink Lindsey

Our moment in history is supposedly driven by curved-line predictions, such as Moore's Law (which posits the doubling of computer firepower-per-dollar every 18 months) and Gilder's Law (bandwidth increases three times faster than the speed of computers). According to these curves, there is constant and overwhelming change as far as the eye can see.

But two recent works challenge the proposition that we will encounter either Malthusian damnation or transcendent salvation any time soon. *A General Theory of Love*, by Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, and Richard Lannon (2000), and *The Social Life of Information*, by John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid (2000) both demonstrate that culture, values, and our internal wiring have the damnedest ways of shaping, stalling, confounding, or accelerating any future. They affirm once again the eternal truth that even the Zeitgeist is subject to certain immutable and unmistakably human delays.

On the other hand, Bruce Sterling's novel *Holy Fire* (1996) asks what would happen—in human terms—if one of these curved-line predictions came true. It posits a society in which biotechnology is growing at the pace at which computers are now developing. If you have money in such a world, then you are effectively immortal, so long as biotech is moving faster than you are aging. Of course, there's a human hitch, such as the woman who retains the memories and the mind of a 100-year-old, but with the glands of a 24-year old. *That's* what a cultural revolution feels like.

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Second Amendment Ammo

By David B. Kopel

Washington treats the gun issue as one of pure symbolism, passing ineffective laws such as the ban on (nonexistent) "plastic guns" to show that politicians are "doing something." In truth, though, protecting the Second Amendment is a matter of life or death. These books explain the public safety benefits of responsible gun laws—and the terrible consequences of repressive laws.

No book has ever had more of a dramatic influence on the gun policy debate than John Lott's *More Guns, Less Crime* (1998, revised 2000). This is the most thorough criminological study—with the most data and the most variables—of any subject, ever. Lott proves that laws which allow law-abiding citizens to carry handguns for lawful protection lead to a significant drop in violent crime, especially crimes against women. He also takes on other

important topics: the facts about gun accidents, the harmful effects of the Brady Act (a statistically significant increase in rape and in assaults against women), the shameless dishonesty of the gun prohibition lobby, and more. Along the way, he teaches the reader multivariate statistical analysis—although you don't need a calculator to enjoy the book.

I edited and wrote part of *Guns: Who Should Have Them?* (1995), so of course I'm biased. But the book really does have the best analysis of such important topics as women and guns (by Skidmore women's studies professor Mary Stange), the racist roots of gun control (by Rutgers law professor Robert Cottrol), and the fraud that permeates the "public health" case against guns (by constitutional lawyer Don Kates and several medical professors), "assault weapons," and issues regarding children and guns.

Walter Edmonds' novel *The Matchlock Gun* won the Newberry Medal way back in 1942 as that year's best contribution to children's literature. It's based on a true story that took place in upstate New York in 1756. With his father gone to help the militia fight in the French and Indian War, a 10-year-old boy has to defend his family from Indian attack using an old Spanish matchlock gun, which is twice as large as he is. Will he be able to master the gun and protect his family? Thanks to the Newberry award, even the most politically correct librarians will have trouble refusing a donation of this book.

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Global Views

By Brink Lindsey

Globalization, defined both as increasing international economic integration and, more broadly, as the contested advance of market forces in the world economy, is a defining fact of our era. Figuring out what it means and whether it's a good thing or a bad thing is the central challenge of international economic policy, and our next president will face that challenge in everything from his dealings with other nations' economic policies to coping with demonstrators in the street opposed to what they think globalization means. He won't be able to get away from it. These books will help him understand the historical context of the current debate and guide him to a proper understanding of the issue.

A good place to begin would be Edward Bellamy's 1888 utopian novel, *Looking Backward,* which was set in the fall of 2000. It describes a future that never could come to pass—one based on the illusory promise of central planning, a world where all social problems are dispensed with by the supposed glories of top-down central management of all economic production. It was under this delusion that many of the world's economic structures were built, particularly ones that prevented the growth of the international division of labor in the communist bloc and most parts of the developing world. The discovery that Bellamy's, and their, vision was a hoax has led to the tottering and collapse of many of those structures, thereby allowing the reconnection of one part of the world to another through trade and investment. Globalization is really the aftermath of the collapse of the dream of central planning, an aftermath made messy and complicated by the wreckage left behind.

"A president needs to know two different things. The first is that we have a lot of new problems. The second is that most of our new problems are at least 100 years old."

—Jonathan Rauch

The story of how we got from that false dream to our current hangover is told in *The Road From Serfdom: The Economic and Political Consequences of the End of Communism* (1996), by Robert Skidelsky. He chronicles in a compact and readable but still analytically sophisticated way the rise and fall of the collectivist experiment.

More specifically illuminating on where we should go from here, and simple enough for even a politician to understand, is *The Choice: A Fable of Free Trade and Protectionism,* by Russell D. Roberts (1993). The fundamental choice today, as when Roberts' book first appeared, is between open markets and a return to closed and state-dominated economies. This book sets up that choice as a dialogue between the 19th century economist David Ricardo, best known for promulgating the theory of comparative advantage to explain how all nations can benefit from free international trade, and an industrialist drawn to protectionism. Ricardo must save his soul by returning to Earth and converting the industrialist to the cause of free trade. A wacky premise, yes, but in the book's digestible, easy-to-read way, it walks the reader through all of the major arguments in favor of protectionism and against open markets, and nicely demolishes the fallacies behind the protectionist temptation.

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Legal Help

By Walter Olson

Is the American legal system one that doesn't need any major overhaul? Or has it, among its many strengths, some serious flaws crying out for reform? One of George W. Bush's campaign themes has been that the civil litigation system is broken and needs fixing; and as supporters of capital punishment, both Bush and Gore have had to respond to mounting concerns about the reliability of the criminal justice system. Even if a president wanted to duck these issues, there'd still be the matter of what kind of attorney general to pick, whom to appoint to the bench, and whether to veto any legal reform bills Congress might pass.

On the continuing hot topic of lawsuit reform, Peter Huber's *Liability: The Legal Revolution and Its Consequences* (1988) is still the best book on how the American legal system invented the field of product liability more or less from scratch, what the predictable consequences were, and why we continue to suffer a hangover from it.

Because it's historical and philosophical in its approach, it wears well.

The civil and criminal cases recounted in Richard Ofshe and Ethan Watters' *Making Monsters: False Memories, Psychotherapy, and Sexual Hysteria* (1994) will be examined for a very long time by those seeking to understand how bad therapy and bad law fed on each other to inflict on the courts the recovered-memory and day-care-abuse hysterias of the early 1990s. Future generations will marvel at the credulity and sentimentality that paralyzed the normal operations of skepticism, so that the most outlandish accusations were enough to send people to prison or put them through terrible ordeals.

A work of fiction that ought to be better known than it is, Heinrich von Kleist's 1810 novella "Michael Kohlhaas" (available in *The Marquise of O— and Other Stories*) is the story of a man who suffers an injustice and appeals to a series of authorities for a remedy without getting the satisfaction he deserves. By the end, people are being slaughtered, towns burned, and regimes threatened with collapse, and Kohlhaas still doesn't have his justice. An inspiration for E.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime* (1975), the work raises such questions as whether rectifying old injustices is worth the risk of creating new ones, whether having a just cause entitles you to require third parties to help you attain it, and to what extent it's the system's fault that it can drive people to such extremities.

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Leading Edge

By John J. Pitney Jr.

As this year's presidential campaign wound down, a casual TV viewer might think the presidency's main qualification is looking good on *Oprah*. It's about more than that, most specifically leadership, which comes not from being mediagenic but from thinking hard about the consequences of actions.

So I think our new president needs to read the most recent edition of *Army Field Manual 22-100*, issued in August 1999. It's titled *Army Leadership*. You might not think an army field manual would be terribly deep or profound reading for a political leader, but this one is. It makes the point that leadership extends far beyond the battlefield. It reminds us that leadership consists of what leaders must be, know, and do—that leadership is a matter of character, competence, and conduct.

Our next president would also do well to understand *The Godfather*, both the 1972 movie and the 1969 novel by Mario Puzo. One of its central themes is what a leader has to do to maintain the loyalty of followers. One reason Vito Corleone was so successful is that he took care of his people. *The Godfather* is also useful in reminding us how pervasive betrayal and disloyalty can be. More broadly, it's a healthy, subtle reminder of the unanticipated results of government regulation. Government made Vito Corleone possible through Prohibition and various other regulations.

"The president is not supposed to be superintendent of schools, but he should know what makes good schools good and why education reforms so seldom work."

—Diane Ravitch

But our president also needs to understand that government is not simply a matter of putting in a coin and getting what you want. *The Mild Voice of Reason: Deliberative Democracy in American National Government* by Joseph M. Bessette (1994) reminds us that government is a matter of deliberative reasoning on the merits of public policy. It doesn't work that way as often as it should, but it can and does happen. Ideally, a president should help ensure it happens more often.

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Old Insights

By Jonathan Rauch

A president needs to know two things. The first is that we have a lot of new problems. The second is that most of our new problems are at least 100 years old. There's nothing like a bit of history and a bit of theory to temper a politician's natural tendency toward urgency and haste.

The first thing a new president should read is Charles Dickens' *Bleak House* (1853). The novel not only contains some of the most sonorous prose in the English language and some of Dickens' most imaginative feats, but also describes how lawyers prolong a lawsuit until they are rich and everyone else is bankrupt. "This scarecrow of a suit has, in the course of time, become so complicated that no man alive knows what it means," Dickens writes. "Scores of persons have deliriously found themselves made parties in *Jarndyce and Jarndyce* without knowing how or why." Or, if you prefer, read Dickens' 1857 masterpiece *Little Dorrit*, whose Circumlocution Office ("Its finger was in the largest public pie, and in the smallest public tart") and senior Circumlocution official (Mr. Tite Barnacle) are creatures that any modern government reinventor would do well to study and understand.

The second book is Mancur Olson's *The Rise and Decline of Nations* (1982). There's nothing new about interest groups or about the depredations they cause. Any president who hopes to deal with them needs to understand why shallow, short-term measures like campaign finance reform only scratch the surface. Olson's masterly book explains the dynamic of interest groups more powerfully and broadly than anything else to date.

The third book is Ron Chernow's *Titan: The Life of John D. Rockefeller, Sr.* (1998). Rockefeller was ruthless, self-righteous, brilliant, innovative, and completely ignorant of politics—not a good combination. Reading Chernow's excellent biography shows how there's nothing new about politicians attacking business and that, somehow, both politics and

business survive. In fact, Al Gore on HMOs and drug companies looks pretty soft-spoken next to the politicians that Rockefeller dealt with, but we still managed to make the economy bigger and the country stronger.

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Looking-Glass Education

By Diane Ravitch

The president is not supposed to be the superintendent of schools, but he should have an understanding of what makes good schools good, why education reforms so seldom work, and what ideas permeate the education establishment.

The president will find an excellent summary of the last century of research between the covers of Jeanne S. Chall's *The Academic Achievement Challenge: What Really Works in the Classroom?* (2000). He will also find that education has been plagued time and again by failed innovation. There is this romantic strain within education that looks for the easy way to learn, the fun way, the way that involves no effort. And it turns out that teaching and learning are not easy.

To successfully understand education debates, one has to understand alternate realities. To help him make the shift between the world most Americans live in and the one that surrounds federal education policies, I recommend he read Lewis Carroll's *Alice In Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass.* This would give him a wonderful perspective on many federal education programs.

For instance, a couple of years ago, writing about Head Start, I complained about the lack of evidence for its educational effectiveness. I later got a call inviting me to come to the Department of Health and Human Services and learn about the latest evaluations of Head Start. So I read the evaluations and met with the person in charge. The studies said that kids are happy, kids are getting medical care, kids are getting nutrition, and their parents are getting jobs. There was one study of what kids were learning that said they weren't learning anything. They enter Head Start knowing zero letters and by the end of the year they learn one or two letters. The reason they don't learn any letters is that no one is attempting to teach them any letters. I was absolutely enraged. The original purpose of the Head Start Program was to get kids a head start in education, so they might be able to catch up with middle class kids. Middle class kids are learning all their letters, at home and in real preschools.

If I were putting together the president's bedside reading, I would have him read W.H. Auden's *Collected Poems* (1991). It would tell the president a great deal about the concise use of language. It might even give him some wonderful allusions he could use in his speeches.

"The new president should read about civil liberties. Rights are especially embattled in the criminal justice system, thanks largely to the War on Drugs."

—Nadine Strossen

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Attaining Liberty

By Nadine Strossen

The new president should read about civil liberties to renew his commitment to our nation's founding ideals of "liberty and justice for all." Eighteenth-century American reality was far from those ideals, and we still have not attained them.

Rights are especially embattled in the criminal justice system, thanks largely to the War on Drugs. The U.S. incarcerates and executes far more of its citizens than any other developed country. Our prisons are overcrowded with individuals who committed nonviolent, consensual drug offenses. Moreover, the record-breaking populations of our prisons and death rows are disproportionately members of racial minorities, reflecting pervasive discrimination. Too many politicians pander on these issues, afraid of being labeled "soft on crime." We deserve a president who has both the information and the political courage to promote reform of our criminal justice and drug policies, finally repudiating the demagogic rhetoric that has driven these policies for decades.

In *Race to Incarcerate* (1999), Marc Mauer, assistant director of The Sentencing Project, offers a devastating critique of our current crime policies and suggests constructive alternatives.

Standing up for constitutional rights is often politically unpopular, so John F. Kennedy's *Profiles in Courage* presents fitting role models for a president committed to protecting civil liberties. Published in 1956, *Profiles* is a classic work that merits regular re-reading. It celebrates a diverse range of past leaders who led their peers and the public by remaining true to their principles, not opinion polls.

Given the long tenure of Supreme Court justices, a president's most lasting impact on our civil liberties is through his appointments to the Court. That subject is explored in *Protect and Defend* (2000), the latest novel by best-selling author Richard North Patterson. As he struggles to appoint a justice who honors even the most controversial constitutional rights, the book's fictional president, Kerry Kilcannon, is a splendid exemplar for any actual head of state. (The ideologically diverse legal and political experts whom Patterson consulted while writing the book included our two most recent presidents.) This gripping novel thoughtfully examines the issues with which a principled president must grapple in honoring his oath to "protect and defend" our Constitution, including its promise "to secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity."

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Bum Rap

Lynne Cheney vs. Slim Shady

By Brian Doherty

Would-be second lady and former head of the National Endowment for the Humanities Lynne Cheney is no coward—and no fool. During her Senate testimony about media violence in September, Cheney didn't flinch while naming those she believes are polluting American culture with intolerable filth and vulgarity. And unlike Tipper Gore 15 years earlier, Cheney didn't finger nowheresville bands like W.A.S.P. and the Mentors as examples of pop perfidy. She attacked one of the biggest-selling recording artists around, rapper Eminem, whose birth name is Marshall Mathers and whose self-consciously sinister alter ego is "Slim Shady." Since its release in June, Eminem's latest offering, *The Marshall Mathers LP*, has sold over 7 million copies. His first CD, 1999's *The Slim Shady LP*, has moved more than 3 million units.

"The time has come to get very specific, to ask individuals to be accountable," Cheney told the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation. "So here is a name: Marshall Mathers. In [the song] 'Kill You,'...he...imagine[s] the joys of murdering any woman he might come across. 'Wives, nuns, sluts,' whoever 'the bitches' might be."

What Cheney and a host of other critics either won't or can't acknowledge is that Eminem is not merely a bestseller; he's also one of the *best* pop artists of his time. He's an unparalleled verbal wizard and a master of his chosen art form: the provocation. Perhaps more to the point, *The Marshall Mathers LP* is a sophisticated, though profane, meta-pop meditation on his relationship with his fans and his responsibilities toward society.

Eminem seems fairly obsessed with these matters and addresses them with greater wit and a deeper appreciation of the ambiguities of human life than Cheney managed. "How many retards listen to me and run up in the school shooting when they're pissed at a teacher?" he muses in the song "Who Knew." "Her, him, is it you, is it them?/'Wasn't me, Slim Shady said to do it again!'/Damn! How much damage can you do with a pen?/...I just said it, I ain't know if you'd do it or not." On the track "I'm Back," Eminem mocks the notion that listening to "bad" music somehow relieves wrongdoers of responsibility for what they do: "I take each individual degenerate's head and reach into it/Just to see if he's influenced by me/If he listens to music...he's an innocent victim/And becomes a puppet on the string of my tennis shoes."

Eminem's Slim Shady character captures perfectly the feelings of outrage and powerlessness that often accompany—indeed, perhaps define—adolescence.

Not to whitewash: Eminem does indeed rap about raping his mother and killing his wife. (Unsurprisingly, perhaps, he is involved in a defamation lawsuit with the former and divorce proceedings with the latter.) He also portrays (and sometimes advocates) violence against gays, women, boy band N'Sync, and rival rap act the Insane Clown Posse. But how seriously is anyone expected to take a CD that starts off with a faux "Public Service Announcement," the last line of which, delivered in the finest bland "official" voice, is, "Slim Shady is fed up with your shit, and he's going to kill you"?

More than his detractors recognize, Eminem is openly torn between conflicting desires to say whatever he wants, especially if he knows it will upset all the right people, and to do the right thing and live a normal life. *The Marshall Mathers LP* is rife with such ambivalence—while he mocks the idea that the media environment excuses or explains individual perfidy, he also recognizes his own persona's sickness and sometimes blames his behavior on his mother's negligent parenting. In "Criminal," he raps, "My mother did drugs—tar, liquor, cigarettes, and speed/The baby came out disfigured...It was a seed/Who would grow up just as crazy as she/Don't dare make fun of that baby 'cause that baby was me/...How the fuck you supposed to grow up when you weren't raised?"

Does exposure to this kind of entertainment hurt kids? Like Al Gore and Joe Lieberman, Cheney assumes it does. Oddly, if they're looking for entertainment industry allies, they need look no further than Eminem himself. He goes farther than his critics in portraying himself as possibly responsible for real-world carnage. One of *The Marshall Mathers LP*'s best tracks is "Stan," a haunting number in which a disturbed young Eminem fan writes his hero an increasingly screwy series of letters. In the end, the song's title character descends into a booze-and-pill-induced frenzy, ties up his pregnant girlfriend, stuffs her in the trunk of his car, and then drives himself and her into a river. Violence against women, nihilistic self-destruction, drunk driving—exactly what youngsters need to be protected against, right? But the point of "Stan"—spelled out in a final verse in which Eminem, too late, responds to the letters—is that this is a seriously dreadful act which makes even Eminem "sick." And Stan is a fictional character; no critic can point to any real Eminem fan so inspired by his hero to violence or destruction.

Eminem presents such a grotesquely self-hating and negative image of himself that it's almost too obvious a joke when he mocks the idea that anyone would want to emulate him. As he puts it in "Role Model," "I slept with 10 women who got HIV/Don't you wanna grow up to be just like me?/I got genital warts and it

burns when I pee/Don't you wanna grow up to be just like me?" And yet a song like "Stan" recognizes that some fans might want to—especially kids from the same kind of rootless, poor, emotionally starved background Mathers claims he rose from. (He raps in "Who Knew": "Read up/About how I used to get beat up/ Peed on, be on free lunch/ And change schools every three months.")

There isn't any easy didactic message in Eminem's music to tidily support a political position about the influence of media violence. As Cheney might recognize when discussing a novel or play, such nuanced ambiguity about important questions is a touchstone of serious art. Certainly, there's far more to Eminem's output than a series of disconnected scenes of mayhem and cruelty, lacking all context and conscience. (Cheney also ignores how attractive the rapper's snaky, minimalist beats and hooks *sound*, apart from any issues of message. Eminem's enemies are tone deaf to his musical skills, though they're worth considering when pondering his appeal.)

Eminem

That said, there's no question that Eminem is marketed to children, though not in the literal terms the Federal Trade Commission and Congress fret over. Eminem's Slim Shady character is custom-made to appeal to teens, because it captures perfectly the feelings of outrage and powerlessness that often accompany —indeed, perhaps define—adolescence. Eminem is profane, rebellious, determined to be himself, to speak what he takes to be the truth about his emotions and what he sees around him. He's all the more determined to do so if it pisses off authority figures. And in a world largely dominated by modern liberal cant, the best way to outrage adults is to come across as anti-gay, anti-woman, and pro-violence. As Eminem says in "Criminal," "Half the shit I say, I just make it up to make you mad." Such an attitude speaks directly to adolescent anomie and rebellion. While it is surely annoying to adults, it isn't evil.

It's also why lots of kids listen to his music—from troubled types resembling "Stan" (who says Eminem's records "help ...when I'm depressed") to the dutiful youngsters I saw recently when participating in the Los Angeles Coastal Cleanup, a day-long event during which volunteers picked trash out of a local waterway, Ballona Creek. Cheney and her Democratic counterparts might not believe it, but those boys and girls did their good deeds with Slim Shady tunes blasting from their boom box.

In attacking Eminem during the Senate hearing, Cheney's central metaphor, proudly copped from Republican speechwriter Peggy Noonan, portrayed "children as intelligent fish swimming in a deep ocean." Music, movies, and video games, explained Cheney, are like "waves...[that] go through [our children] again and again, from this direction and that.... Cleaning up the water, the ocean our children are swimming in, is...the most important environmental issue of our time." This is a terrible metaphor, implying against all evidence that human beings, even young ones, are in mindless thrall to what they see and hear. (Youngsters, no matter how many Looney Tunes they watch, are not apt to hand their dads dynamite cigars.)

Tell those kids cleaning up Ballona Creek that the music they enjoy is "the most important environmental issue of our time." The world of popular culture concerns characters and situations that are often harsh and unpleasant. In this respect, of course, it's just like the highbrow culture that never seems to exercise the Cheneys of the world. Eminem's work is artistically and morally serious, even as it's outrageous, reckless, and often funny as hell (for those who can still laugh at punctured pomposity and the shock of taboo shattering). Cheney doesn't notice this, because the political critics of popular culture, as usual, quite literally do not know what they are talking about. Which, all questions of censorship and constitutionality aside, is reason enough to ignore them. Or, if you are more aggressive in your objections to solemn, ignorant attempts to manage other people's choices or raise other people's children, you could join Eminem and "put one of those fingers on each hand up."

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JONATHAN MANNION

Pink Mice and Petri Dishes

Artists contemplate biotechnology

By Ronald Bailey

The genetic revolution is upon us, and artists are manning the barricades. But which side are they on: the one that views biotechnology as a horrifying new development or the one that sees it as a tool of liberation? On the evidence of *Paradise Now: Picturing the Genetic Revolution*, a recent exhibition of 39 artists at the downtown Manhattan gallery Exit Art, the creative community itself isn't quite sure.

Some of the show's contributors are still invoking the hoary image of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein monster. Surprisingly, though, the majority seems ready to celebrate the revolution. *Paradise Now* arguably marks a significant shift in sentiment within the art community from opposing and resisting progress in genetic manipulation to embracing and exploring its aesthetic possibilities.

On the fearful side are pieces such as Christa Rupp's *New Labels for Genetically Engineered Food*. Rupp displays 30 plastic salad bar containers with stenciled bogus health warning labels like "Original DNA Product." In *Genomic License No. 5*, conceptual artist Larry Miller offers official-looking certificates to gallery goers so that they can "copyright" their personal genetic codes, declaring themselves "Original Humans." Miller claims that over 2,000 people have used his forms to declare themselves exclusive owners of their unique genetic code. I turned down the offer to sign a certificate. Anyone who wants to reproduce my genetic code may do so; I'm still the original.

The "subversive" anonymous art cooperative ®™ark produced a spoof Powerpoint presentation called *Bio Taylorism*, supposedly showing the "benefits" of biotechnology for corporations, complete with charts and graphs, that are supposed to gloss over the purported risks to human life posed by biotech. It's an exercise in clever, if routine, corporation bashing.

Far more fascinating than such predictable protests are pieces that use and celebrate biotechnology as a new medium for artistic expression. Take the installation *Genesis*, by Brazilian-born, Chicago-based artist Eduardo Kac. Upon walking into a darkened room, viewers see a large circle of light on the far wall—the projected image from a micro-video camera of a bacteria-laden petri dish in the center of the room. On the other walls glow various texts, including a verse from Genesis: "Let man have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves over the earth." On a different wall, Kac has translated the Bible verse into the dots and dashes of the first electronic language, Morse code. He then translates the Morse code into the ACGTs of the genetic code, assigning word spaces to adenine, dots to cytosine, letter spaces to guanine, and dashes to thymine. The "art gene" version of Genesis is actually produced by stringing these DNA bases together. Then the DNA bases are inserted into the living *E. coli* bacteria in the petri dish that viewers see projected before them. By activating an ultraviolet light over the petri dish, viewers can cause the bacteria to mutate, thus becoming co-creators with Kac.

Earlier this year, Kac, working with scientists at France's National Institute of Agronomic Research, created a transgenic female rabbit, named Alba, that glows green under ultraviolet light. Alba glows green because the EGFG (enhanced green fluorescent gene) taken from a species of jellyfish was inserted into her genome when she was an embryo. So now she produces the glowing protein in her fur.

Mary Shelley memorably and fearfully imagined that science would beget monsters. Two hundred years later, artists are taming those monsters and turning them into works of art.

HeLa, by Christine Borland, also uses video technology and a petri dish to raise questions of ownership related to cells and tissues. Her video camera magnifies HeLa cells and displays them on a flat panel screen. HeLa cells come from a 31-year-old black woman named Henrietta Lack, who died of cervical cancer in 1951; her cells have survived her for nearly 50 years as the first and most famous "cell line" used in biomedical research. Lack's family didn't find out about the cells until the 1970s, and even today there is no settled legal principle that says who owns tissues and cells once they're taken from a patient: Do they belong to the patient, or are they common property that can be appropriated by researchers? Borland's treatment leaves the question open for viewers to contemplate.

Other artists explore how biotech might shift our definitions of identity. Kevin Clarke's *Portrait of James D. Watson* is a large-scale piece that juxtaposes metal lab shelving reminiscent of the three-dimensional structure of DNA with giant photographic panels of an actual DNA sequence taken from Watson's own genome. (The Nobel Prize–winning Watson, of course, is the co-discoverer of DNA's double helix structure, which marks the beginning of the genetic revolution.) In a similar vein, *Portrait of Isabel Goldsmith*, by Steve Miller, starts with cultured chromosomes taken from Goldsmith's white blood cells. He photographed them under an electron microscope and then numbered and classified them by size. Both of these works underscore the fact that our DNA is not our identity—thus correcting the confusion at the heart of Larry Miller's *Genomic License No. 5*.

There's another neat riposte to Miller: *One Tree*, by Natalie Jeremijenko, stations

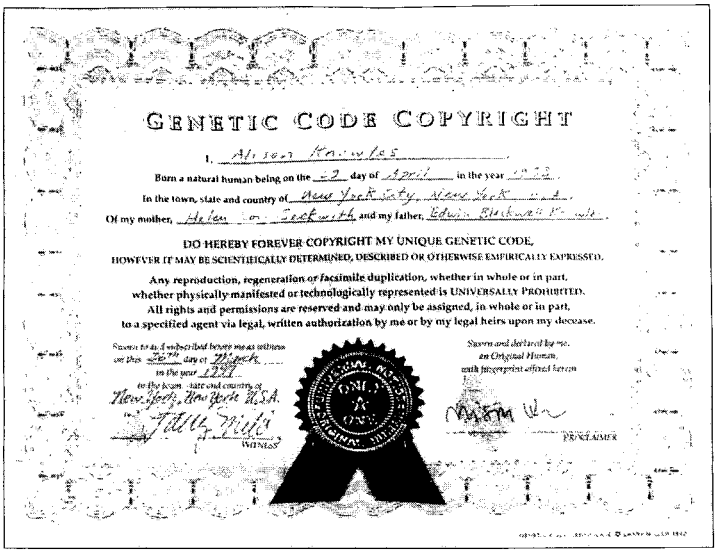
cloned trees in the gallery to make the point that, while genetically identical, "they are not the same." Clones are nothing new (indeed, every Granny Smith apple is clonal) and each clone's response to its environment makes it different from the others. Contemplating these leafy clones, the fear of cloning stoked by hysterical headlines about Dolly the Scottish sheep drains out of viewers.

Sculpted by Bryan Crockett, *Monument to Man* is a seven-foot-high, heroic pink-marble statue of the famous Oncomouse, the first transgenic animal ever patented. The Oncomouse has tumor-causing genes inserted in its genome so that it can be used for cancer research. The actual Oncomouse is hairless (thus pink-skinned) and only a few inches long. The statue is startlingly lifelike, and its dynamic posing recalls classical works like the Laocoön. On one level an absurd statue of a giant mouse, *Monument to Man* also wryly honors humanity's growing biological ingenuity and would be the perfect complement to the lobby of some brash, self-confident biotech laboratory that wants a work of art to symbolize its creative activities.

Another artist, Brandon Ballengée, is testing the line between science and art. His installation of photos, gurgling tanks, and texts looks very much like the science fair project of a precocious high school student. Ballengée is trying to recover an extinct species of African frog through a controlled breeding experiment. By cross-breeding closely related frogs, he hopes to recreate the phenotype, or physical appearance, of the extinct variety, which featured shortened limbs and snout. While some may feel momentarily woozy over Alba the glowing green bunny, surely many will applaud Ballengée's aesthetic attempt to revive a species. In the hands of humanity, biotech may restore creatures long gone, save those now here, and create novel ones for us to enjoy.

At the beginning of the 19th century, Mary Shelley memorably and fearfully imagined that science would beget monsters. Two hundred years later, artists are taming those monsters and, in the process, turning them into works of art.

Ronald Bailey (rbailey@reason.com) is REASON*'s science correspondent.*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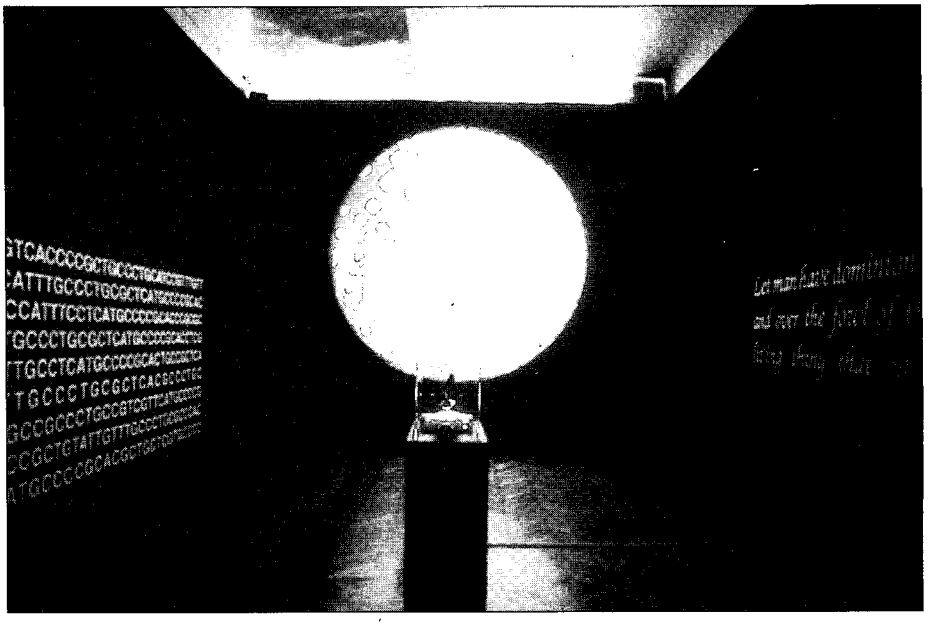

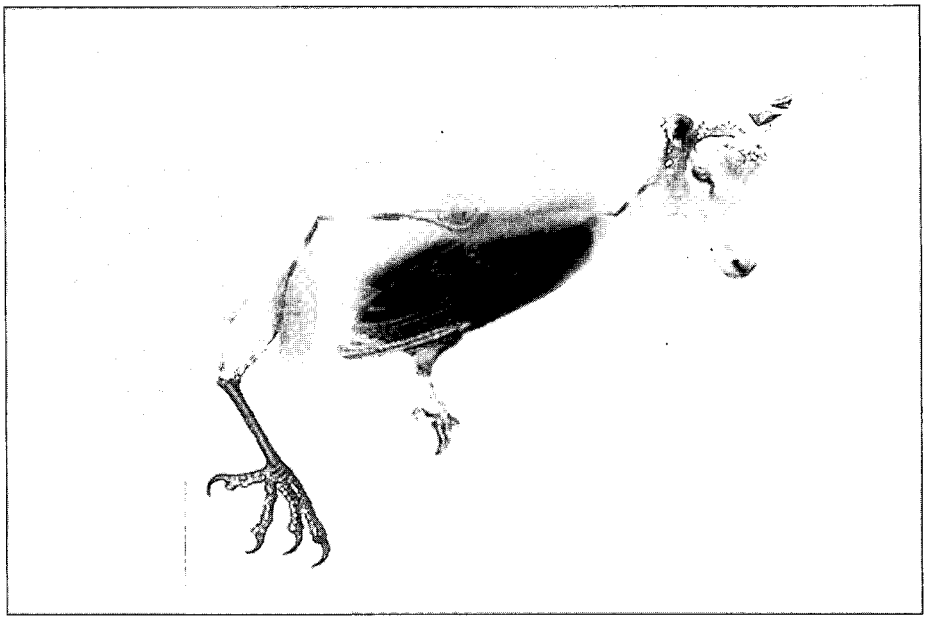

From top: Larry Miller's *Genomic License No. 5*, Eduardo Kac's *Genesis*, and Eva Sutton's *Hybrids*

Tinkers, Tailors, Sellers, Spies

The case for cautious optimism about the Internet

By Jesse Walker

The Internet is not the first innovation to provoke both fear and ecstasy. Rarely, however, have commentators moved with such ease from one posture to the other. Not since Stalin has a god so frequently failed.

Consider the case of Douglas Rushkoff, the much-cited author of *Cyberia* and *Coercion*. In 1994 he opined that, "as computer-networking technology gets into the hands of more cyberians, historical power centers are challenged.... The hypnotic spell of years of television and its intense public relations is broken." These days he's somewhat less enthusiastic. "I don't use the web," he told the conspiracy zine *Steamshovel Press* earlier this year. "I don't like what's there. I know that almost every website you go to is working to push you towards the buy button somewhere. ...It's like walking through the mall."

In other words, Rushkoff has shifted from an overstated stance to a blind one. The Web *I* surf is filled with public diaries, private jokes, amateur movies, home-mixed music, eccentric zines, contentious forums, and other independent efforts. In territories like these, buy buttons are scarce. I quote Rushkoff not because his views are cogent, but because they're common: Where he goes, others are sure to follow. Or rather, given the man's talent for trend chasing: Where he goes, others are sure to have arrived.

Each year seems to bring more warnings that the Net is falling under consolidated corporate control. But despite the naysayers, the online world is more of a free-for-all than ever before.

Rushkoff's turn as a digital Whittaker Chambers may be genuine, but if so he's a rarity. Scratch a born-again Net skeptic, and chances are you'll find someone who never was that enthusiastic about the online world. More likely, his conversion is a convenient pose, adding the right touch of resigned realism to whatever it is he would have said about the Internet anyway.

For example: "Five years ago, there was tremendous enthusiasm for the emerging World Wide Web," the prominent media critic Norman Solomon wrote in his syndicated column last January. "Talk about the 'information superhighway' evoked images of freewheeling, wide-ranging exploration. The phrase suggested that the Web was primarily a resource for learning and communication. Today, according to the prevalent spin, the Web is best understood as a way to make and spend money." This, he explained, is part of the "steady commercialization of cyberspace." And not just commercialization, but consolidation: "Almost all of the Web's largest-volume sites are now owned by huge conglomerates. Even search-engine results are increasingly skewed, with priority placements greased by behind-the-scenes fees."

So half a decade ago, Solomon must have been agog at the Net's potential, right? Not quite. "It's pleasant to believe that the Internet will provide a free flow of information and opinion," he wrote in 1996. "The rhetoric makes plenty of egalitarian claims—but the emerging reality is something else." And what was that emerging reality? "From radio to television to modem, each new gizmo has arrived with inspiring potential—undermined by extreme disparities in people's access to economic resources and political clout. Now, billionaire Bill Gates and his collaborators are smiling as they pour big investments into the Internet and tie those projects to other mass-media endeavors."

So Solomon never was a Net booster, despite the impression his more recent column gives. Sharp readers could have picked this up from the column itself, with its odd notion that *information superhighway* was some sort of populist slogan. The highway metaphor was popular in corporate and government circles, but the cyberpunks of the day resented it fiercely. It was a sign, we were told, that the freewheeling days of the Net were over: What once was an organic, grassroots medium was now to be as monotonous as the Interstate.

This complaint, in fact, is one of the most consistent rhetorical themes in the history of the Net. Digital jackboots, statist or corporate, have always been lurking around the corner; the good times have always been almost over. So, for instance, when AOL and CompuServe took off, the cry went up that the days of online freedom were ending; we would soon be purely passive consumers, trapped in tightly controlled corporate environments. Yet AOL and CompuServe did not supplant the larger Net. They found that they had to provide access to it, and in some ways emulate it, or else lose their customers.

In 1995, when the U.S. privatized its portion of the Net backbone, lawyer-pundit Andrew Shapiro warned in *The Nation* that cyberspace might consequently lose its "vibrant public spaces," the online equivalents of parks and town squares, where "bothersome, in-your-face expression flourishes and is heard." To stave off that prospect, Shapiro called for "Congress and state and local governments to establish forums in cyberspace dedicated explicitly to public discourse." Mixing crises, he added: "More and more, travelers in cyberspace are using commercial on-line services such as America Online and CompuServe, which...have their own codes of decency and monitors who enforce them. Even those who prefer the more anarchic Usenet discussion groups are subject to regulation by self-appointed system operators and moderators." Thus, "We're either paying to publish in mass-circulation periodicals where editors are free to censor us or we're writing pamphlets no one knows about because there's

no public space in which to distribute them."

Needless to say, the retreat of the public sector did not erode the public sphere, as anyone who subscribes to an e-mail list can report. Nor have digital pamphleteers been unable to distribute their work to wide audiences. But Shapiro's poor prognostication has not prompted him to revise his views. Indeed, in his bland tome *The Control Revolution*—a recent paean to "balancing" online options, with the balancing to be done not by individual users but by intellectuals like Shapiro—he trots out the same worries, attached to a different villain: "total filtering," a "new level of personal control over experience" that we might "mishandle" to "our own personal disadvantage." Thus: "What may be most distressing about total filtering, then, is the way it could solidify a trend toward the elimination of spaces where citizens can confront and engage one another." If AOL isn't destroying our public spaces, why, we'll just destroy them ourselves.

I, on the other hand, *have* revised my views—for I too was once a Net skeptic. In the early '90s, I thought cybertopia was an attractive prospect but a dubious one: While Rushkoff, George Gilder, John Perry Barlow, and others were predicting limitless possibility, I, like Solomon, recalled the similar promises that had initially been attached to radio and to cable TV, and how easily they had been swept aside once the media giants figured out ways the government could regulate the new industry in their favor.

Now I've evolved into an optimist. Each year seems to bring more warnings that cyberspace is selling out, that the disorderly, decentralized, eccentric Net is falling under consolidated corporate control. And each year brings more evidence that, despite the naysayers, the online world is *more* of a free-for-all than ever before. There are, of course, genuine threats to this happy anarchy, from the feds' wary regulation of private encryption to copyright law's encroachments over speech once protected by the fair use doctrine. But there is a substantial difference between a threat and a defeat. And some alleged threats—like the e-commerce that frightens Rushkoff—aren't actually that threatening at all.

The planet is indeed filled with corporations who'd love to "control" the Internet. That is, there are lots of e-businesses out there that would like to dominate their industry, would like that industry to have a strong online presence, and would like their customers to swallow their prepackaged content rather than navigate the Net on their own. Thus far, most such companies have either failed or been forced to revise their business models, revamping themselves to deal in tools for active customers as well as packages for passive ones. (The best example of this, of course, is AOL.)

Furthermore, Net users have been more than willing to create such tools on their own, before any established company starts providing them—even if that means breaking or bending the law. Witness Napster and its many imitators, which provide

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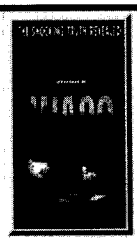

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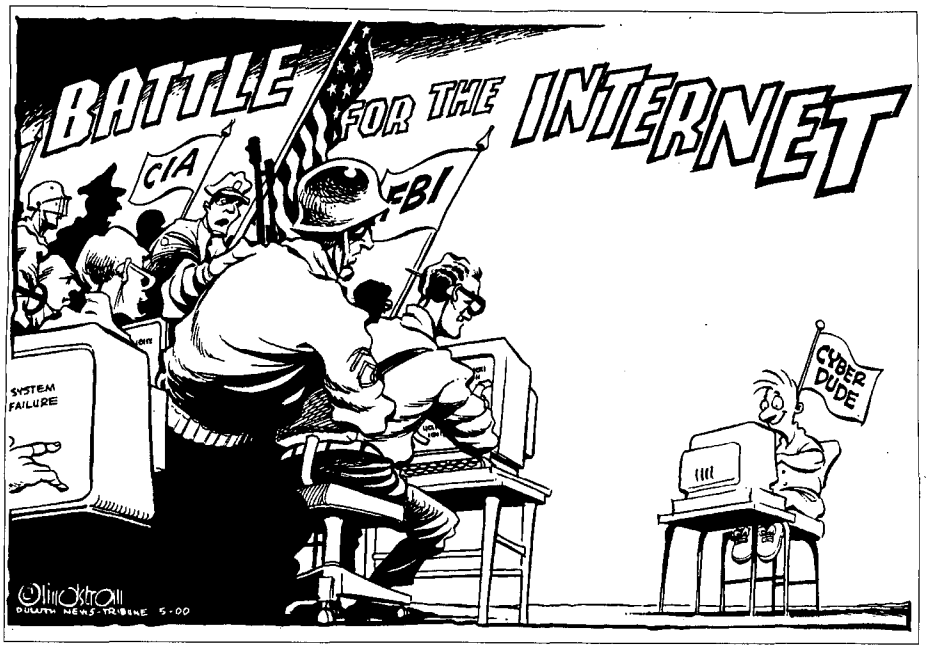


online means of exchanging music and other media products without regard for the packaging and the distribution channels set up by the culture industry. (Already, the declinists are scrambling to take these programs into account. "Napster is truly a creature of its electronic moment," one wrote in *Inside.com* last June. "It may be the last pure Net play—the last time a small bunch of bright, fuzzily idealistic young people was able to blindside an entire industry with a clever new idea.")

There are many species of born-again cyberpessimism, from a puritanical distaste for any sort of e-commerce to a simple predisposition toward gloom. Some of the oldest digerati may also be distressed that cyberspace no longer seems to revolve around them—that many people would rather send e-mail to their grandchildren or download Garth Brooks songs than whisper darkly about smart drugs, spies, and temporary autonomous zones. As anarchy spreads, it starts to lose its romantic edge.

And then there's the mistake made by Solomon and me: the assumption that history was bound to repeat itself. In *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communications Politics in Dubious Times*, historian Robert McChesney falls into this trap, mistaking cyberspace for radio and the end of the century for the end of the 1920s. "In the 1990s a new argument has emerged," he writes, "the effect of which is to suggest that we have no reason to be concerned about concentrated corporate control and hypercommercialization of media. This is the notion that the Internet, or, more broadly, digital communication networks, will set us free. This is hardly an unprecedented argument; every major new electronic media technology this century, from film, AM radio, shortwave radio, and facsimile broadcasting to FM radio, terrestrial television broadcasting, cable TV, and satellite broadcasting, has spawned similar utopian notions."

Not, mind you, that McChesney thinks the Internet is identical to its predecessors. It is, he concedes, "a quite remarkable and complex phenomenon that cannot be categorized by any previous medium's experience." Nonetheless, "The current communication revolution...corresponds most closely to the situation in the 1920s," when there "was little sense of how radio could be made a profitable enterprise and much discussion of how liberating and democratic it could be."

It's no surprise that McChesney would use the early history of broadcasting to decipher the early history of the Net. There *are* a lot of parallels, and besides, McChesney just happens to have written several articles, his Ph.D. thesis, and his first book (1993's *Telecommunications, Mass Media, and Democracy*) on the political economy of radio in the '20s and early '30s. But those parallels—and, perhaps, some ideological blinders—have kept McChesney from seeing some important ways the two timelines diverge.

The history of radio begins with the tinkers, some of them extraordinarily young, who made a hobby of building and using transmitters, trading tips and modifying each other's designs. The early amateur radio enthusiasts negotiated complicated covenants to divvy up the airwaves and formed self-regulating bodies to enforce the rules. Some also played hacker-style pranks on commercial and military radiomen, and even the nonpranksters often displayed a healthy disrespect for their purported betters. (Once, Susan Douglas reports in 1987's *Inventing American Broadcasting*, a naval operator in Boston told a ham operator to "butt out." The amateur replied, "Say, you Navy people think you own the ether. Who ever heard of the Navy anyway? Beat it, you, beat it.")

Business soon discovered that the amateurs knew their craft better than many professionals did, and began hiring accordingly. "Do you suppose I could get a commercial operator to operate a radio telephone set?" wrote Robert Gowen, chief engineer for the De Forest Company, in *Radio Broadcast* magazine. "I found they knew absolutely nothing about it and in every case I had to get a 'ham,' simply because the former was a man who knew only how to press the key and read code while the latter was a technician who had trained himself in the fundamentals of radio and knew how to analyze the circuit and keep it functioning properly in addition to his knowledge of key pressing. Likewise, every man I had in my laboratory was an amateur, not because I was one but purely because they were the only ones obtainable who could tackle the problems placed before them." In World War I, the military made the same discovery.

Business also absorbed another amateur invention: broadcasting. Amateur broadcast stations were outlawed in 1921, just as commercial stations were starting to appear, but that didn't mean radio was completely commercialized. A wave of nonprofit stations emerged, run by churches, theaters, cabarets, colleges, and other civic and artistic institutions. The commercial stations, meanwhile, ran little that we'd recognize today as ads; you can hear more sales pitches on NPR in 2000

STEVE LINDSTROM

than you would have on a business station in 1925. (Which, incidentally, is where McChesney joins the story—the amateurs don't really figure in either of his books.)

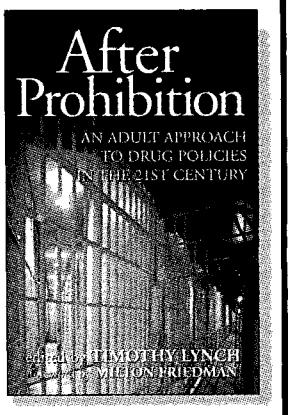
It wasn't market forces that killed off the nonprofit stations. It was government regulation, which deliberately favored one kind of radio over the others. Much of McChesney's first book is dedicated to that story. Much of the rest describes what he calls the "broadcast reform movement," a loose collection of activists who wished the government would regulate the airwaves in the "public interest"—even as the feds were using the same slogan to excuse their interventions on behalf of the commercial networks.

In McChesney's view, cyberspace is now at the same point radio had reached when the broadcast reform movement emerged. The fight now is for civic activists to get the hearing that those reformers didn't get, because "the structural basis of the communication system should be decided after the social aims are determined. *The key factor is to exercise public participation before an unplanned commercial system becomes entrenched.*" (The emphasis is his, but I'm happy to reinforce it.) As an example of such public participation, McChesney cites the path Canada followed as U.S. radio took the commercial road: a three-year "period of active debate" including "public hearings in twenty-five cities in all nine provinces."

But I think something much more interesting than that is happening, something that represents a radical break with the radio timeline. Rather than move toward the political debates of the early '30s—either the relatively open forums held in Canada or the relatively closed ones in the U.S.—we've let the tinkers back in. With the Net, "public participation" hasn't meant debates among politicians charged with representing the public. It has meant actual members of the public carving out space for themselves online, and forging tools to protect that autonomy.

Privacy advocates, for example, worry about government and commercial services tracking Web surfers' buying patterns. But cheap yet powerful encryption—a tool the intelligence community has tried, with relatively little success, to suppress—has dealt a blow to the govern-

What Happens after Prohibition?



"You cannot read this book without recognizing the social tragedy that has resulted from the attempt to prohibit people from ingesting an arbitrary list of substances designated 'illegal drugs.' . . . Not since the collapse of the attempt to prohibit the ingestion of alcohol has our liberty been in such danger as it now is from the misnamed 'war on drugs.'"

—Milton Friedman

"I think the facts boil down to drugs being a bad choice. Drugs are a handicap. But should someone go to jail for just doing drugs? I believe the time has come for that to end."

—Gary Johnson
Governor, New Mexico

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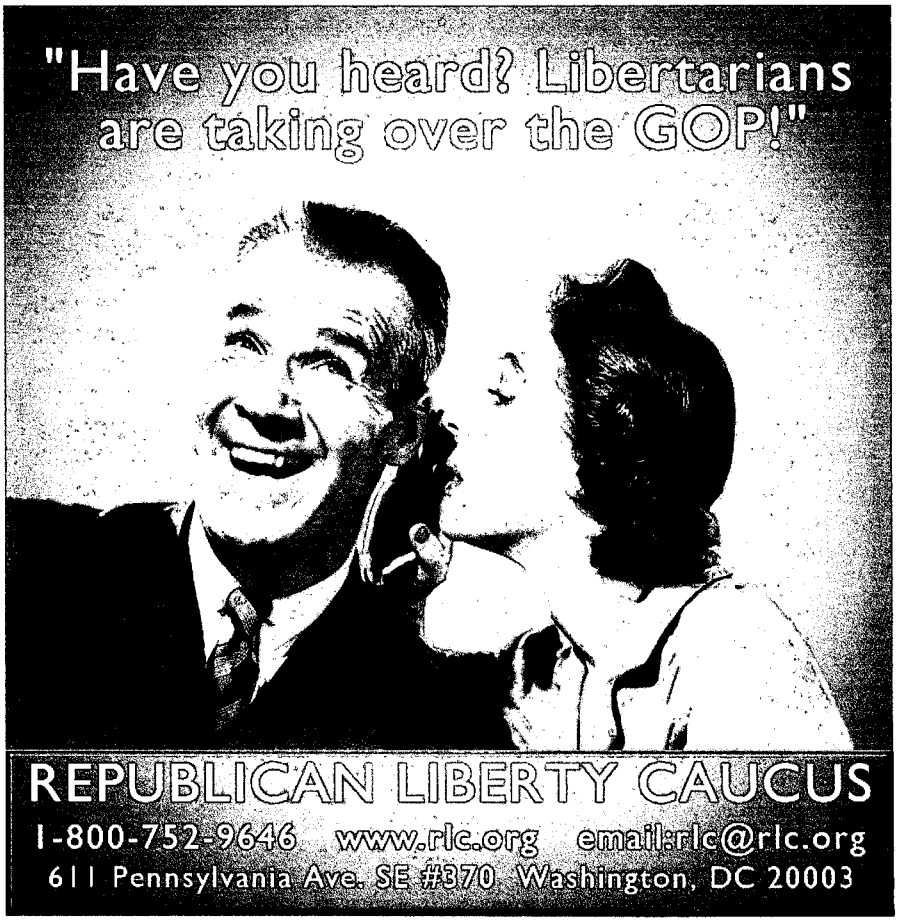
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ment spies, while programs like Anonymizer allow the privacy-conscious to explore the Web without being tracked by a database company.

The greatest threat to online liberty right now may be the culture industry's push for more restrictive copyrights, restraining our right to use pieces of preexisting works in new projects of our own. (See "Copy Catfight," March.) The rise of peer-to-peer file sharing—Napster, Gnutella, and the rest—has put the copyright owners back on the defensive.

And remember Norman Solomon's warning that "search-engine results are increasingly skewed, with priority placements greased by behind-the-scenes fees"? Now upstart programs like Gnutella and FreeNet, with their radically different model for online searches, might render all the AltaVistas and HotBots obsolete, replacing their centralized systems with methods that are both more distributed and more thorough.

Nor must you be a programmer to make a difference: Consumers can still vote with their feet—or, more precisely, with the buttons on their mice. A few years ago, venture capital was pouring into "push" technology, services that would shove selected information (and ads) toward customers rather than letting us "pull" it from the Web ourselves. The media hyped this model as the future of the Internet, and the usual fears were expressed that the Open Net of Old would soon die. Customers, however, rejected the idea in droves, and the highest-profile push company, PointCast, died an unlamented death earlier this year. Part of the problem was bad software (PointCast clogged up the data pipelines), and more limited push services persist. But no one expects them to be anything but a voluntary supplement to the Net.

I've already noted the similar story of how AOL and CompuServe learned to provide access to the rest of the Net or risk losing customers. Much the same has happened within the Web: Almost all of the most useful, and therefore most visited, sites provide lots of links to other parts of the Web. Solomon's claim that the "largest-volume sites are now owned by huge conglomerates" is therefore beside the point.

It's beside the point for a more important reason too: The Web's largest-volume sites still receive only a small fraction of the stops surfers make online. Solomon is discussing the Web as though it were television, with a handful of channels dominating the medium and every smaller player striving for a mass audience. In fact, the Web is a collection of overlapping niches, where the most popular destinations include tools for going elsewhere.

The economics of the Web are such that it's very cheap to start a site but tough to make money with it. The medium is therefore biased toward amateur, noncommercial projects. (The most popular online activity—e-mail—is also the most amateur and open.) Apart from *The Wall Street Journal* and the larger porn operations, the most successful commercial sites are usually low-budget, small-staff operations without much overhead; they are either independently owned (like *WorldNetDaily*) or owned by larger companies with enough sense to leave their subsidiaries alone (like *Suck*). Heavily funded corporate sites generally finish last.

McChesney himself notes that "most of the Internet activities of the traditional media firms have been money losers, and some have been outright disasters." If anything, this understates the case: Most heavily capitalized Internet media projects have been disasters, whether or not they have a traditional media firm behind them.

In July, *APB News*, a useful site devoted to police reporting, laid off its entire staff —140 people—and turned over operations to a small group of volunteers; it probably would have closed its doors entirely if SafetyTips.com hadn't bought it a month later. *Salon*, perhaps the best-known webzine, continues to lose money and to lay off workers. Pop.com, a multimillion-dollar entertainment site backed by Steven Spielberg, Jeffrey Katzenberg, and other major Hollywood figures, collapsed without putting *anything* online, except a handful of press releases.

The most thunderous crash so far is that of the Digital Entertainment Network, a heavily hyped webcasting operation. Matt Welch, a survivor of DEN's descent, wrote an engaging and witty memoir of his time there for the *Online Journalism Review* (ojr.usc.edu). After reading his account of that particularly dysfunctional—and well-funded—corporate hierarchy, you won't just understand why it flopped so spectacularly; you'll wonder why the collapse took as long as it did. "Web sites looking to make real money," Welch concludes, "need to A) be Yahoo, B) sell porn, or (best of all) C) start small, and win a following. There's a dirty little secret about content companies: popular, scaled-down sites like Suck, CapitolHillBlue, and TheSmokingGun all make money, as in that stuff left over after all the bills are paid. Meanwhile, heavily staffed, venture-backed heavyweights like Salon, TheStreet.com, and APBnews are bleeding money like hemophiliacs."

McChesney, starting with the same observation, ends at a radically different conclusion. "But none of the media firms have [sic] lost their resolve to be a factor, even to dominate, cyberspace," he writes. "The media firms have a very long time horizon and very deep pockets. ...Indeed, by the end of the 1990s the possibility of new Internet content providers emerging to slay the traditional media appears more farfetched than ever before."

The scaled-down sites that Welch mentions don't factor into McChesney's analysis. Neither do nonprofit, volunteer-run alternative outlets like the Independent Media Center, which neither needs nor tries to make money. But they seem to be getting more out of the big media companies' investments in cyberspace than those companies themselves, playing in the ruins of failed corporate experiments. (Indeed, the Independent Media Center—a loose network of 29 audio/video/text production centers around the world—has grown at a pace that most for-profit Internet enterprises can only envy.)

The best proof that independent media thrive online is the series of stories that have emerged on the Net while the major media initially ignored them. The most obvious is Monicagate, broken by *The Drudge Report* while *Newsweek* waffled over whether to publish anything about it. If that doesn't impress the leftist McChesney, perhaps this will: The story of purges and possible corruption within the left-wing Pacifica radio network, for years ignored by most of the ink-and-paper

press, was extensively covered and debated online, building a base that made 1999's demonstrations, lawsuits, and other revolts at the Pacifica stations possible. Given that McChesney spends a chapter bemoaning the commercialization of public broadcasting, he should be impressed that the foes of that process have found the Net as congenial a home as the foes of the Clinton administration.

Somewhere between the first draft of this essay and the last, Douglas Rushkoff revised his views yet again. "I have become so anti-corporate," he wrote in the London *Guardian* last August, "that I do not mind exploiting them as much as they think they are exploiting us. They mean to take as much as they can get from us, so what is so terrible about our taking whatever we can from them? In other words: Why not let big business build our internet?" Corporations are sinking millions into the Net, he notes, yet few have figured out business models that work for them. Meanwhile, "at least some portion of the countless investment dollars...is going towards building the infrastructure itself."

In short, "Thanks to the shortsighted, profit-driven motives of mindless corporations, the internet is cheaper to use, more widely available, and spreading faster than ever before....Let's milk every last drop from the corporate cows before they figure out they've been nourishing an infant who means to swallow them whole." And so Internet apocalypse meets Internet utopia, and the two visions turn out to be not so distant after all.

I'll try to steer clear of Rushkoff-style overstatement—I'm not sure we're about to see cows entering the mouths of babes. But if cyber-utopianism can be silly, cyber-optimism is certainly sensible. The Net is an increasingly open territory, impervious to the carefully drafted plans of governments, service providers, well-funded Web sites, record companies, and both radical and establishment critics. As long as that's true, innovation and self-expression will thrive online.

Associate Editor Jesse Walker (jwalker@reason.com) has written his own book about radio, forthcoming next year from New York University Press.

How to Kill a City

By Tom Peyser

Mario Cuomo once said of America's big cities that "the future once happened here." Cuomo wanted to evoke the days of Al Smith and FDR, when city leaders saw themselves as architects of a new kind of society destined to reform the whole of America. Indeed, the New York governor wanted to inspire contemporaries once again to visionary undertakings. As both Fred Siegel and Max Page make clear, such a selective evocation of a vanished past to promote a particular vision of the future is typical of 20th century urban history. Siegel's 1997 book, which has now been reissued in paperback with an updated conclusion, chronicles the impact of liberalism on a half-century of urban society and politics in three major cities. Page, adopting a narrower focus, recreates the conflicts surrounding four decades of remarkable development in Manhattan. Both authors convincingly argue that getting one's way in matters of urban policy depends on getting people to embrace sometimes highly questionable visions of what they have been, and what, consequently, they can become.

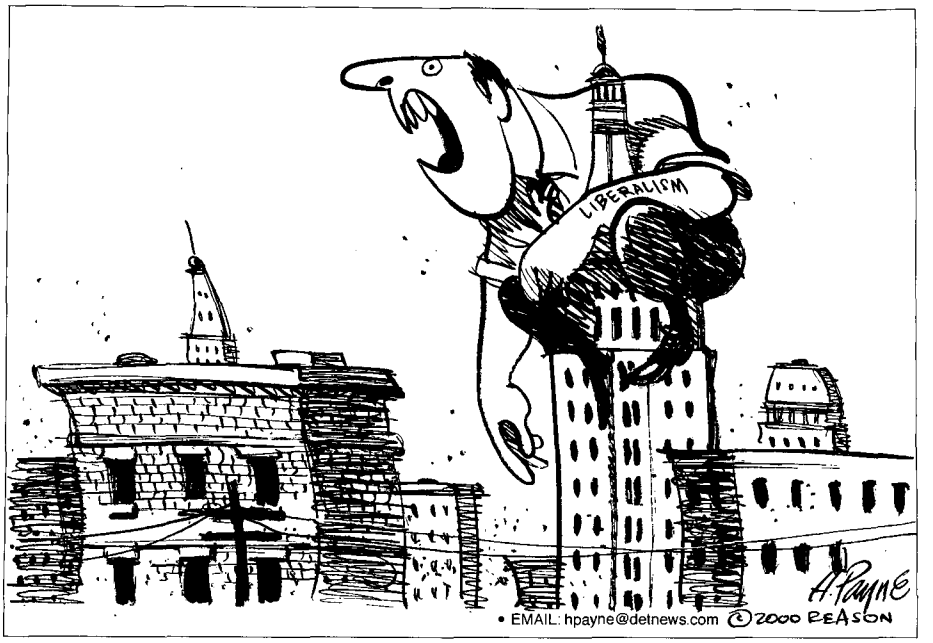
The Creative Destruction of Manhattan, 1900–1940, by Max Page, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 303 pages, $27.50

The Future Once Happened Here: New York, D.C., L.A., and the Fate of America's Big Cities, by Fred Siegel, San Francisco: Encounter Books, 314 pages, $15.95

Page's *The Creative Destruction of Manhattan* is not a history in the conventional sense, as its omissions make clear. For example, if the Promethean Robert Moses had died in 1940, the end of the period Page considers, he would probably still be remembered as a pivotal figure in the development of the island; yet Page mentions him only in passing. Rather than constructing a continuous narrative, Page, a Yale historian, has written a book that lies in what he calls "the rich zone between social, cultural, and urban history." Thus in each of the book's six central chapters he focuses on an episode revealing the sometimes vertiginous complexity—"economic, political, ideological, and aesthetic"—that shapes urban planning debates and development.

In his most substantive chapters, Page compellingly probes conflicts arising from the precedent-setting zoning of Fifth Avenue, slum clearance, historic preservation (with special attention to City Hall), and tree conservation and removal. Two chapters—on the founding of the Museum of the City of New York and on I.N. Phelps Stokes' *The Iconography of Manhattan Island*, an encyclopedic attempt to cram the island's visual past between two covers—read more like literary analysis than historical investigation. These can be passed over lightly by readers interested in the many things Page has to teach them about how conflicting interests are treated by markets and magistrates.

Much to his credit, Page is at pains throughout the book to show how cultural assumptions influence public policy, and how—and by whom—such assumptions are disseminated. Accepting the usual depiction of New York as "the ultimate capitalist city," Page does not tell a facile story about how the rich always get their way in the town where Washington Irving coined the phrase "the almighty dollar." Instead, he focuses on what comes between the conception and fulfillment of political reform and entrepreneurial development: conscious attempts to shape public opinion so as to make self-serving or sometimes ideologically extreme schemes seem acceptable to the public. In one of his central claims, Page insists that "through the manipulation of traditions by private developers and equally savvy reformers, New Yorkers learned to see the cycle of destruction and rebuilding as 'second nature'—self-evident, unquestionable, and inevitable."



Page's book sometimes succeeds in spite of itself. Nowhere are the merits and limitations of his treatment more evident than in his analysis of the most ideologically charged issue he treats: slum clearance. For many observers, past and present, the tenements of Manhattan's Lower East Side, where many recent arrivals from Ellis Island settled, were and remain an indictment of relatively unrestricted markets and proof of the need for government intervention.

But when Page tells us that "New York originated the idea of a tenement house 'problem,'" he makes the provocative point that there is nothing inherently problematic about poor neighborhoods. His quotes around the term *problem* indicate that tenements become problematic only when people adopt a particular vision of the world. In that vision, those homes the middle class finds intolerable for itself have no place for anyone, just as a thistle, which in a meadow is just another plant, becomes a problem only when the meadow has been marked out for a rose bed. The success of such an analysis depends on the historian's ability to remain aloof from others' definitions of "problems" and "solutions."

Yet this is just where Page falls short. For example, he discusses the prominent slum-clearance role played by Jacob Riis, whose *How the Other Half Lives* (1890) shocked its readers with lurid descriptions and photographs of tenement life. Page notes that Riis' focus on what he saw as the moral shortcomings of the tenement dwellers obscured his understanding of the slums. Yet when Page wants to reveal what he thinks was *really* going on, the scare quotes fall away like chips of marble hiding the statue within, and we get this: "Rarely did Riis insist that the root cause of the slum problem was a system of property exploitation." But Page himself never explains this "exploitation."

Nowhere does Page take very seriously the idea that must have been held by many immigrants, namely that the slums were not a problem but part of a solution—their best available alternative to living conditions in such places as Sicily, Bohemia, and Russia. Page explicitly claims not to be taking sides, but peek behind the curtain of objectivity, and what you find is the standard-issue melodrama in which markets create "exploitation," "overproduction," "underdevelopment," and "chaos." It is indicative of the anti-market ideology prevailing in the academy that one may present such views without much in the way of justification and still think of oneself as disinterested and objective.

It is in fact characteristic of Page's style, and of much academic writing today, that the author clues us in to the deep processes of history, as he understands them, in asides, sly diction, and metaphors. For example, those who made common cause with Riis, who wanted to help the poor by demolishing their homes, come off as somewhat confused reformers who nevertheless played an important role in prompting city government to overcome its "awkward adolescence" and "immaturity." One mark of that immaturity was the reluctance to cast aside the "taboo"—not the principle—that had prohibited the government from becoming the landlord of last resort. If Page critiques the way others make ceaseless urban development seem natural, he does not seem entirely aware of how his own writing portrays the steady expansion of government power as something inevitable and desirable, like growing up.

Page, then, is not a very reliable guide to the significance of markets, whether in real estate or in general. Yet his book is still valuable. It persuasively demonstrates how the terms of the urban policy debate often depend on the "collective memory" of the city and are often set by two groups: those who (cynically or not) wish to manipulate public opinion to promote their interests and those whose ideological biases prevent them from recognizing how their sometimes utopian schemes will affect ordinary men and women on the ground. This is a lesson for our times, when, for example, "blight" has become the semi-official word used by media and government types for the neighborhoods of those less well off than themselves.

Picking up chronologically almost exactly where Page leaves off, in the 1930s, Siegel's *The Future Once Happened Here* differs from Page's book in scope, method, and orientation. Like Page, however, Siegel is concerned with the way that cherished and frequently distorted images of the past can influence city dwellers' assessment of the present and plans for the future.

According to Siegel, for instance, the reluctance of New Yorkers to dismantle their welfare state may be attributed to "New Deal nostalgia," a belief that New York became what it truly was only when Mayor Fiorello H. La Guardia figured out, with the help of fellow New Yorker Franklin Delano Roosevelt, how to plow federal dollars directly into city programs. Siegel, who grew up in New York's Jacob Riis Housing Projects, knows that such often-unarticulated values and collective memories can determine the destiny of cities.

HENRY PAYNE

In telling the Depression and post-Depression stories of New York, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C., Siegel is guided by a desire to tell the story of modern liberalism, which, he writes, was "born in the big cities" and "eventually died there." Whether or not every happy city is the same, Siegel shows that each of his three cities has become unhappy in its own way, and each sheds light on different aspects of the liberal program.

He depicts Los Angeles as "the centrifugal city," whose policies have been ruinously crafted without reference to "a core of shared civic values." New York shows us what happens when a New Deal faith in government drifts away from the traditional values that Siegel believes the

One welfare mother angrily informed New York mayor John Lindsay, "It's my job to have kids, and your job, Mr. Mayor, to take care of them."

New Deal promoted. The unique institutions of Washington give rise to a unique civic pathology, one closer to the nation-building schemes of post-colonial Africa than to urban renewal. Siegel's depiction of "black nationalism in power" might make the nation's capital seem like too odd a case to be appropriate in a book dedicated to the question of American liberalism in general, but by drawing attention to the blank check Congress for many years was willing to hand city leaders, Siegel uses Washington to argue that the failures of post–New Deal liberalism derived not from a lack of cash but from what Marxists might once have called "internal contradictions."

Siegel has a gripping, if grim, story to tell, and he tells it superbly. He does not attempt to mask his sense of outrage at bureaucrats and their court intellectuals who concocted city-sponsored substitutes for "outmoded" institutions such as the family

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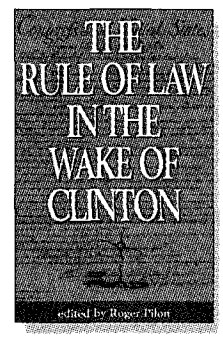

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The Rule of Law in the Wake of Clinton edited by Roger Pilon. 164 pages, $9.95 paperback.

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and the work ethic. Nor does he judge these bureaucrats and others from some ideologically pure line that he wishes to promote; rather, he subjects them to a no-nonsense, carefully documented exploration of how radical schemes helped destroy individuals and neighborhoods.

Occasionally, Siegel's passion and stylistic verve get in the way of his argument. When he writes of the "rubes" who have beaten the cities at their own game by using the federal government to siphon New York's money into the South and the Sunbelt, or of "Afro-fascist goons," presumably those thus described will find it hard to attend to his subtler points. Nor will squeegee men feel their grievances have been given a sympathetic airing. Nevertheless, Siegel's emphasis on the distressing practical consequences of modern liberalism enhances the likelihood that he will make many readers change their minds about the wisdom of allowing social workers to mold the values of their citizen clients. He is not preaching only to the converted.

This is not to say that Siegel is uninterested in pinning down the ideological core of big city liberalism. He repeatedly returns to two mutually reinforcing themes, what social scientist David O. Sears termed "the riot ideology" and what Siegel himself calls "dependent individualism." The former, which grew up in the immediate wake of the 1965 Watts riots, encouraged the aggrieved to see their "power to disrupt" as "a claim against the treasury" and encouraged legislators to see social programs as a kind of "riot insurance." Siegel relishes drawing attention to the more ludicrous but quite telling signs of such thinking, such as when mayoral candidates in Los Angeles referred to the Rodney King disturbances as either "riots" or "uprisings," depending on whom they were addressing.

"Dependent individualism," on the other hand, is Siegel's name for the idea that while restraints on an individual's behavior must not be imposed by law or popular prejudice, governments have an obligation to pay for the consequences of that behavior. Siegel shows that the uneducated poor sometimes had a more vivid understanding of this officially promoted ideology than did officials and social workers. As one welfare mother angrily informed New York mayor John Lindsay, "It's my job to have kids, and your job, Mr. Mayor, to take care of them." Siegel has an extraordinary ear for such moments that crystallize the unintended cultural consequences of ambitious liberal reform.

While he is devastating on the attack, when Siegel tries to defend the kind of government action he wants his arguments become less compelling. It is not at all clear that he himself has remained unaffected by New Deal nostalgia. According to Siegel, the New Deal worked because it respected cultural norms, such as the idea that rewards are related to work. He makes a broad claim about "the success of New Deal liberalism in integrating new populations into the larger society" but provides no serious defense of the claim. Siegel does not ask whether, on the whole, more people would have entered the mainstream more quickly had the scope of government intervention never expanded. Nor does he explain why he thinks it possible that a nontotalitarian government can succeed at something as totally encompassing as integrating individuals into society.

Siegel writes that the "optimistic assumption underlying the book" is that "a better set of policies might improve conditions." But Siegel's book itself shows that once the principle of government intervention in work and housing has been accepted, politicians or utopian idealists will begin a bidding war for clients that will tend to brush aside his concern for the disastrous social implications of programs that the majority may find delightful. Did any of the cynical or deluded people he describes ever claim to be offering a *worse* set of public policies?

Such objections, however, are almost incidental; Siegel is much more interested in exposing the fallacies underlying what has already been done than he is in laying out a detailed plan for what is to be done. Moreover, it seems fair to say that if Siegel's readers include open-minded makers of policy, the policies that we get might in fact be a good deal better than those we have gotten.

Tom Peyser (tgpeyser@att.net) teaches English at Randolph-Macon College. An extract from his newly published novel, W.W., *may be found at www.xlibris.com/ww.html.*

Scatterbrained Child Rearing

By Gwen J. Broude

When it comes to raising children, there is no such thing as too much good advice. So when accounts of neuroscientific advances in our understanding of child development began to appear in the popular press a couple of years ago, it sure sounded like good news. Parents could now raise their children in line with the hard facts about the relationship between human growth and brain development.

Don't rejoice just yet. In their complementary books on human development, psychiatrist Peter R. Breggin and education expert John T. Bruer warn us not to believe what we have been hearing about the new neuroscience of child rearing. They point out that the media's version of brain-based child development bears little resemblance to the real thing. Even worse, those same wrongheaded theories have landed on the desks of policy makers. The result, as Breggin and Bruer describe in grim detail, is policy initiatives that can be very dangerous to children.

The Myth of the First Three Years: A New Understanding of Early Brain Development and Lifelong Learning, by John T. Bruer, New York: The Free Press, 244 pages, $25

Reclaiming Our Children: A Healing Plan for a Nation in Crisis, by Peter R. Breggin, Cambridge, Mass.: Perseus Books, 340 pages, $24

The mangled accounts of brain science that Bruer and Breggin want to debunk begin with the assumption that brain development is crucial to child development. So far, so good. It is the more detailed

claims, or "myths," as Bruer calls them, about the relationship between brain maturation and a child's maturation that can lead to trouble. *The Myth of the First Three Years* focuses on three such myths, which will doubtless sound familiar to most readers—though most Americans would probably consider them rock-solid facts about how the brain works. Although Bruer is not himself a neuroscientist, his discussion of where and how popular brain science has gone wrong accurately reflects the current neuroscientific literature.

Bruer's three myths are that learning is limited to "windows of opportunity," or critical periods; that these windows of opportunity occur only as long as there is a significant growth of connections, or synapses, between brain cells; and that children require enriched environments for optimal learning to take place during these windows of opportunity. As there is substantial evidence of an explosion in synaptic connections during the first three years of a child's life, the conclusion from popular neuroscience is that development is basically over by the end of the third birthday.

Many recent public policy initiatives have been based on the "vital first three years" vision of brain development. For instance, the frantic push toward universal preschool from the Clinton administration follows logically from that vision, as does the loony notion from Georgia Gov. Zell Miller that state legislators should distribute CDs of classical music to newborns to give them an intellectual head start. This notion causes many parents to believe that the early experiences of their children will seal their fates forever, and to worry that a single parenting mistake will doom their youngsters for life. Bruer argues that all those ideas are based on fantasy.

The myth that learning is limited to the first years of life is based on the finding that the density of connections among brain cells increases very rapidly during the second and third years of life. After that, the number of connections begins to stabilize or to actually decrease. This is a correct description of brain maturation. But as Bruer explains, it's not correct to assume that the brain is gaining connections during the first years of life because children are cramming their skulls with learning.

The "Mythmakers" of popular neuroscience, as Bruer calls them, suppose that brain growth means that learning is happening, and that the subsequent decrease in synaptic density must mean that learning is no longer happening. While that sounds logical, no neuroscientist believes this is an accurate description of the relationship between brain maturation and development. Indeed, it would be more nearly correct to posit the opposite relationship between children's learning and what the brain is doing.

The consensus among neuroscientists is that the explosion of connections among neurons that we see in early life merely sets the stage for the acquisition of knowledge.

The idea that there are critical periods is wrong as a general theory of how children develop. Some skills are most easily learned early in life, but they are abilities that all normal human beings acquire.

It is as if nature is preparing the canvas on which the world subsequently paints. The decrease, or pruning, of connections is what seems to coincide with actual learning. Ironically, then, the brain is most prepared to begin learning at just the point when popular brain science says it is too late for learning to take place. After the synaptic explosion happens, children become newly capable of learning things that they could not learn before.

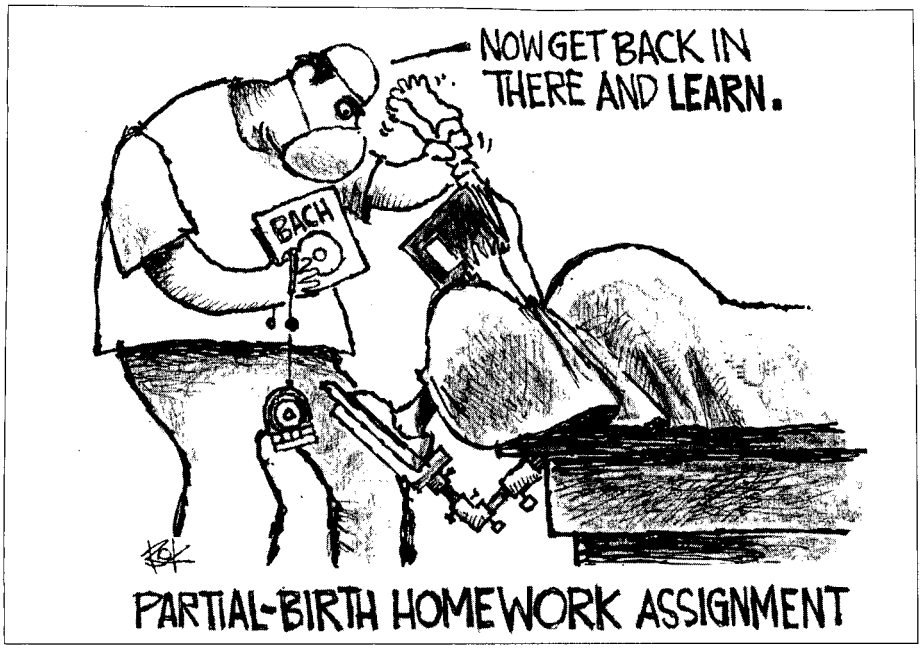
The idea that there are critical periods is similarly wrongheaded as a general theory of how children develop. There are certain skills that are most easily learned early in life—for instance, seeing or talking. But as Bruer points out, we are dealing here with abilities that all normal human beings acquire. Psychologists call these "experience-expectant traits" to underscore the plain fact that the kinds of experience required for their proper development are so basic that virtually no child can help but be exposed to them. It is as if the neurophysiology underlying the trait "expects" to meet up with the needed experience. And indeed, the number of children who are not exposed to language, or light, is vanishingly small. Experience-expectant traits, Bruer observes, are acquired "easily, automatically, and unconsciously."

Not all traits are experience-expectant. My brain did not expect to meet up with algebra in the environment. Nor did it expect to encounter writing. Or the piano. But the skills of math or reading or playing music are just the sorts of skills for which there are no critical periods. They are experience-dependent traits that can be learned at any point in life. These, ironically, are also the very sorts of skills on which popular versions of brain science focus when they warn us about critical periods. Children in our culture do tend to learn particular skills, such as reading or adding, at predictable ages. But "we should not confuse this kind of learning with the existence of critical periods for those skills," Bruer writes. "What is culturally normal is not biologically determined."

Bruer also debunks the idea that enriched environments are required for optimal development. This notion originates from a misunderstanding of decades-old rat studies in which the learning of rats placed in a so-called enriched environment was superior to that of rats placed in less enriched environments. From this we are to conclude that human children should be exposed to as much stimulation as possible. This is in spite of the fact that the rats in the original experiment were adults and that their enriched environments were still deprived in comparison with what any rat would experience in the wild.

Bruer assures us that all kids need for normal development is exposure to very basic experiences, like ambient light to see, a language to hear, gravity with which to interact, and so on. Thus, his advice is that parents should make sure that their children's sensory systems are in good working order—not too tough a challenge.

Indeed, there is good reason to believe that children can't make use of all the enrichment we offer them, as they tend to develop according to their own timetables



regardless of our ambitions. Try to correct the grammar of a young child who is not ready to learn the lesson. Janie comes home bursting with excitement. "My teacher brought a rabbit to school and I holded it," she gushes. "You held the rabbit?" you say. "Yes, I holded it." "Did you say you held it tightly?" you ask. "No, I holded it loosely," she responds. Janie will learn about irregular verbs on her schedule, not on yours.

Contrary to the almost blatant idiocy of the "first three years" myth—clearly, most useful human learning happens long after age 3—brains are always changing, which is another way of saying that people are always learning, regardless of their age. The greatest surprises from the laboratories of neuroscientists come in the form of evidence that the brain is far more plastic than we used to think. Since the 1980s neuroscientists have demonstrated that adult brains are extremely malleable, so much so that areas of the adult primate brain originally responsible for one function can change jobs. For instance, adult primate brain cells once receiving input from the animal's arm will subsequently reorganize to receive input from the chin and jaw if connections from the arm to the brain are interrupted. If adult brains seem stable, that's only because their experiences have been stable.

This isn't just of interest to academic neuropsychologists. Bruer's Mythmakers have a message that can hurt kids: that we should try to cram all of life's lessons into the first three years of development and then call it quits. This would clearly be fatal to any child's development, as anyone familiar with how brains—or children—actually function will plainly see. If we followed the advice implied by this version of brain development, we would be trying to teach children at exactly the time in their lives when their brains are not yet ready to learn and then stop teaching them at precisely the time that their brains do become ready. Bruer tells us that public policy is in fact heading in this direction. For instance, state legislatures are already considering bills that would decrease or eliminate support for later child interventions to invest those funds in birth-to-3 programs in the belief that this is the only time during which brains are capable of learning.

The public policy implications of popular versions of brain development also motivate Peter Breggin's *Reclaiming Our Children.* Breggin writes in opposition to "biological psychiatry," which "has convinced a great portion of the public that psychosocial and spiritual suffering has no psychological or spiritual meaning whatsoever but emanates instead from abnormalities in the physiology of the brain."

Biological psychiatry says all the traits that children display are determined by brain activity. It is trivially true that all of a person's thoughts, emotions, and behavior are a product of what is going on in the brain. But when people begin to see every inconvenient behavior as a disorder, and when they then propose, on the basis of the so-called new brain science, that we fix the child by fixing his brain, we have got a problem. Breggin targets this recent tendency on the part of educators, psychiatrists, and policy makers to view children's behaviors as dysfunctions when they depart from the norm and then to advocate medical treatments for those supposed dysfunctions.

Biological psychiatry poses threats to children for a number of reasons, all detailed effectively in the first two chapters of *Reclaiming Our Children.* Placing blame for personal suffering or misconduct on brain disease, Breggin writes, "disempowers parents while sapping family life of meaning." If parents are convinced that the source of a child's problems is brain chemistry gone wrong, then they will also become convinced that there is nothing that they can do to change the child's circumstances beyond taking him to a doctor to be medicated. As Breggin observes, biological psychiatry disempowers not only parents but also the child himself. Thus, "to the extent that individuals believe they have 'mental disorders' or 'brain diseases' that are causing their emotional suffering, they become dependent on experts rather than upon themselves for the 'cure.'"

Breggin further explains that rampant diagnosis and drugging of some children is likely to have a bad effect on other youngsters. The message to children is "conform or you are in danger of getting diagnosed and drugged, so sit down and shut up or else." Children soon learn that they had better be quiet, well behaved, submissive, and dutiful.

In a chilling scene, Breggin describes the role of biopsychiatry in last year's White House Conference on Mental Health. Tipper Gore, who chaired the conference, set the tone for the proceedings by announcing during the president's weekly radio address that mental disorders are biological in nature and can be effectively treated with new drugs. In keeping with that theme, Hillary Clinton declared at the conference that the goal of public policy respecting children should henceforth be, in her words, to "identify and get help to children who need it, whether or not they

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want it or are willing to accept it." This would be accomplished, according to Bill Clinton, through a new national school safety training program for teachers, schools, and communities to help identify troubled children and provide them with better school mental health services. As Breggin sees it, the conference was pushing an agenda to encourage more American kids to take psychiatric drugs.

The medicalization of children's behavior may be lethal in ways that Breggin does not mention. As Bruer tells us, children respond to the environment at their own pace. Some psychologists have begun to suggest that this allows youngsters to fine-tune basic competencies before taking up the challenge of developing more sophisticated ones. We see this self-pacing in the way that children naturally regulate the amount of stimulation to which they will respond. Babies turn their heads away if you try to get in their faces. When there is too much going on around them, infants will go to sleep on you. Basically, children tune out stimulation for which they are not ready.

This is consistent with the observation that children have shorter attention spans than adults, and some psychologists think this is not a design flaw. Rather, it may be a limitation that allows children to eventually become smarter adults. Now, think of what drugging children diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) may do. You've got a child who doesn't pay attention as much as adults would like, so some educator decides to drug the kid up so that he will sit still and tune in for a more sustained period of time. If psychologists are right in saying that tuning out is the child's way of regulating his own orderly acquisition of competencies, then artificially tinkering with the child's attention span could be disastrous.

Psychologists have also lately been emphasizing the degree to which different children reach the same developmental goal in different ways. Policies that medicate children so that they will better approximate the ideal child pervert these differences and could seriously interfere with the unique solutions to developmental tasks that different children are in the process of discovering. Never mind the irony that a government that sells diversity as the greatest virtue seems to be doing everything possible to stamp it out in children.

Breggin's preferred way of responding to children's problems is sane. He reminds us that children need to form meaningful relationships with adults and that they need to have their views respected. There's nothing wrong with that advice. But Breggin also commits sins of his own, which derive from his unsubstantiated, inaccurate perception of children as fragile. Thus, in Breggin's view, "If you assume that every child is sensitive, vulnerable, readily injured, and easily broken, then you will never be far from the truth."

Breggin also sees threats to children everywhere. Moving is a trauma. Witnessing the illness of a sibling is a trauma. Competition is a trauma. Unmade beds are a trauma. Being teased is a trauma. Homework is a trauma. Because life is so filled with potential assaults on children's psyches, all children are suffering or may soon be suffering. "As children," Breggin writes, "we suffered every time we were exposed to irrational discipline, every time we failed to receive unconditional love, every time we were bored in school, and every time we didn't get to play enough. We suffered as well whenever we were hurt, threatened, treated unfairly, or otherwise made to feel unsafe." It is not just some children who are vulnerable, Breggin insists. "Identifying children who are at risk is an easy matter: All of our children are at risk."

Contrast Breggin's china doll with Bruer's robust child, as illustrated in his example from rural Guatemala, where children spend the first 18 months of life in circumstances that we would call severely deprived. Nevertheless, these kids perform at the same cognitive level as middle-class American children by the time they reach adolescence. Neuroscientist Steve Peterson, quoted by Bruer, captures the meaning of this anecdote when he observes that "development really wants to happen. It takes very impoverished environments to interfere with development because the biological system has evolved so that the environment alone stimulates development." How does this translate into advice for parents? "Don't raise your children in a closet, starve them, or hit them in the head with a frying pan."

I recommend Breggin's book to anyone who wishes to be educated on the dangers of biological psychiatry. I also recommend that Breggin read *The Myth of the First Three Years.* It is a fine rebuttal to the claim that children are fragile and a vindication for those of us who have always suspected that we were still capable of growing and learning even though we were well past 3 years old.

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Dimness at Noon

By Alan Charles Kors

From an evolutionary and ethological perspective, universities serve the purposes of assortative mating almost ideally. Individuals with mutually desirable traits find each other easily. From that simple fact arises a great deal of what happens outside (and, indeed, inside) the classroom. There are more pheromones in the academic air than in most singles bars. A campus is crawling with people in their prime. If that were not enough, universities add to this hormonal cauldron the heady aphrodisiacs of frequent intellectual and physical self-confidence. The corporate world has no idea what it is missing.

Cultural feminists loathe biological models as much as any scriptural fundamentalist, but they are much given to one particular image from natural history: predator and prey. Frat parties are a spider's web into which innocent victims wander by chance. Professors, in cunning, calculating rut, lay in wait for unwary, dewy creatures who yield to their guise.

Blue Angel, by Francine Prose, New York: Harper Collins, 314 pages, $25

Literature has, to say the least, taken note of these phenomena. Courtship, seduction, and mating, in complex culture, are infinitely nuanced. They will not be defined or controlled by codes of conduct that try to do more than outlaw coercion and violence.

Nonetheless, our campuses, avatars in this of broader cultural and political trends, are in the midst of an effort to regulate the sexual behavior of free, autonomous, and capable adults, with a special regard for the beneficiary of what political correctness defines as an "imbalance of power," the male professor. As anyone worldly would have predicted, they have failed miserably when it comes to the truly predatory, truly clever, or truly self-confident male: the academic equivalents of the Kennedys and Clintons continue to charm the pants off even the feminists and to live their lives with relative impunity. It is, on the whole, the awkward bumblers, the hapless Packwoods, who are destined for ruin (many of them, of course, as self-indulgent and boorish as the professor in David Mamet's brilliant *Oleanna* [1992], a play so much more complex than most critics of political correctness ever understood).

In between, there are the more common consequences of the new sexual inquisition and reign of Big Sister: a male professoriate increasingly afraid to close a door during office hours or to have a cup of coffee with a female student; benighted traditionalists whose ordinary language and honest opinions in class get them into hot (or boiling) water; and, the real stuff of tragicomedy, the ordinary souls who somehow stumble their way imperceptibly into sexual—and thus, in these times, institutional and personal—disaster.

Francine Prose's well-received and popular *Blue Angel* is ostensibly a novel about such an ordinary soul. It seeks to be a satire of the politically correct university. Its title refers both to the celebrated Heinrich Mann novel and the yet more celebrated 1930 film made of it (with Marlene Dietrich as the unforgettably seductive Lola Lola). Therefore, we know from the outset that *Blue Angel* also is about a temptress who leads a smug professor of little self-awareness into personal disgrace, humiliation, and ruin. Seemingly sensitive to the depredations of the Orwellian world of Women's Centers and intrusive, careerist power, Prose's novel even aspires to being a *Darkness at Noon* for our times.

It is none of those things, alas, and never rises above caricature, moral and narrative confusion, and a disheartening inability to get the mood and feel of our campuses right. It is simply an effort to cash in on the culture's fascination with and revulsion toward political correctness run amuck.

Its protagonist, Ted Swenson, teaches creative writing at Euston College in Vermont. He has been faithful to his wife, Sherrie, who works in Student Health, but in middle age, Swenson is suddenly tempted by more. He has a sad daughter whom he has alienated, for reasons good and bad, and who attends another university. He has a multiply pierced, bizarrely dressed, depressive, dishonest Goth girl in his class, Angela Argo, who becomes his obsession and his Lola. She wishes him ill and she uses him for her own ends. She seduces him by sexualized attention and by the sharp eroticism of the prose she gives him to correct, then denounces him, having taped his admission of their encounter. To drink the poison to the last drop, he puts himself through the demeaning ordeal of a campus judicial "hearing," and he loses his family and his job.

Not a single one of the main characters in this novel is credible. To touch us at all or to reveal anything of significance about maleness, sexuality, and current academic absurdities, Swenson would need to descend into this nightmare by stages that arise from the ordinary in life. He delights in his wife's sexuality, has a developed sense of the absurd, and understands the new sexual climate. His sudden and out-of-character fixation on Angela does not even stem from sexual boredom or daydreaming curiosity. Instead, he has an inexplicable attraction to the most obviously unstable and dangerous student in his class. He knows that she has submitted erotic poetry in a course taught by his closest female friend on the faculty, and he checks the work out of the library, which, mysteriously, has shelved it. He knows that she has worked for a telephone sex line, and, to put it simply, that she is deeply disturbed.

Nonetheless, he creates points of contact between her life and that of his wife, and he treats her differently, in class, from all of his other students. One day, he picks her up in his own car at the girls' dorm, drives her to Burlington, passes a zealous campus feminist who sees them together, and then returns to her room (where he is partially seduced). Leaving the building, he is observed by a student in his class. Further, he has no self-insight whatsoever and no understanding of his family. He shouldn't be fired for sexual misconduct; he should be shot for stupidity.

Blue Angel's campus feminists are supposed to arouse horror in us, if for nothing else than their inability to understand

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the nuances of life. They are given no emotions, however, nor convictions, nor personalities. It is Prose who misses the nuances. Angela, the grim Goth, is too insecure to be a true Lola, haunted by her campus isolation, her unpopularity, and her family's disapproval. Her motivations are far-fetched and, in the end, detached from any substantial life, even a sociopathic one. The careerist dean, who thinks that militant feminists can be charmed by dinner parties with retrograde male professors, belongs to the 1950s, not the 1990s, and he could not have navigated political correctness with the behaviors Prose gives to him. The meeting of the faculty that hears and accepts the new sexual policy at Euston College bears no resemblance whatsoever to any such actual meeting, and offers not one voice representative of the current mixture of feminist sanctimony, careerist cynicism, and professorial cowardice.

What drives academic repression, category mistakes, and overreach into private life are quite vivid and passionate claims, the abdication of critical intellect in the face of those passions, an ideology that assigns true and false consciousness to the most unlikely recipients, and the loss of moral outrage on behalf of privacy and liberty. That sad combination has created absurd campuses, of supremely bad faith, that must be experienced to be believed. Literature should permit one to experience it; *Blue Angel* does not.

The one credible character in the novel, Swenson's wife Sherrie, seems well drawn by the gift of authorial inattention. She is there simply as a stable foil to the unfolding chaos, and Prose does not worry much about her persona. This gives her the best lines of the book and an ineffable if accidental goodness and clarity, from which nothing whatsoever follows. Swenson, his sins about to be exposed, asks her, "Do you promise not to hate me no matter what?" She replies: "Have you been sleeping with a student?" On the night before Swenson's hearing, Sherrie, who has left him, calls to say: "This is not a real conversation. This is to wish you good luck." It is Swenson, however, not Sherrie, with whom we are expected to empathize.

The one credible scene in the novel, and it is a very good one, is Swenson's hearing before a faculty panel. Implausibly, the panel is composed of the few faculty whose relationship to Swenson is both complex and known to us, but, here, Prose gets the details right: the sham collegiality; the improvised, bizarre procedures; the excruciating isolation and humiliation of the defendant; the lack of due process; the elements of show trial. The very precision and pain of the hearing, however, and her knowledge throughout that she will make it the climax of her novel, tempt Prose into unbearable pretensions.

It is bad enough that the narrative voice constantly reminds us that it knows the differences between the film (and novel) *The Blue Angel* and the occasional appropriation of those motifs in its own work—a confession that does not mitigate the fact that Prose wishes to use the theme of Lola for dramatic purpose without having actually to engage it. Beyond bearing, however, is Prose's elevation of the ludicrous Swenson to the martyred status of Rubashov, the old Bolshevik now caught up in Stalin's purges, in *Darkness at Noon*. Every time that Rubashov thinks of his own victims—those sacrificed to the Stalinist logic of ends and means—his decaying tooth shoots sharp pain down his nerve. Like Rubashov, Swenson is betrayed, in revenge for his own betrayals, by his tooth, which, in Swenson's case, aches throughout the novel and breaks when he is about to sleep with Angela, ending their affair before any consummation.

There are more pheromones in the academic air than in most singles bars. The corporate world has no idea what it is missing.

The comparison is ludicrous. Rubashov is a man who killed and betrayed to erect the inhuman political logic that will destroy him in its turn, and who discovers, in his toothache, an existential guilt inseparable from his denial of the personal, the empathetic, and the apolitical. Swenson is a self-indulgent, soulless shlemiel who should have seen a dentist, but who wanted sex with an undergraduate Cruella DeVil. It is Disney doing the academic gulag.

There are, indeed, lives withered and ruined by sexual and political correctness on our campuses, for whom mouthing the Clintonian line, "It's just about sex," would only double their already dire punishments. There are sexual Stalinists who act with impunity, and who, unlike Rubashov, run no risk of the political logic devouring its own. Missing the comedy, Prose also misses the tragedy. You will know nothing of either from this opportunistic and shallow novel. ◆

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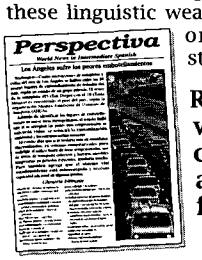

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This is the story of youth gone wrong...and of the penalty hundreds of pretty girls have to pay when they allow themselves to fall victim to unscrupulous men, their own wayward emotions, and the other hidden pitfalls of a sensation-crazed society!

This reform-school girl was staring out from spinning comic racks in the early 1950s, when such future cultural crusaders as Joe Lieberman and Bill Bennett were boys at risk. But unlike the other cover models for Realistic Comics, or the stars of the trashy sub-Hollywood programmers that filled the drive-ins, this co-ed achieved immortality. She owes it to Fredric Wertham, M.D., the anti–pop culture crusader of the day, who used *Reform School Girl!* to illustrate his preposterous anti-comics bestseller of 1954, *Seduction of the Innocent.*

The 1950s are often remembered as tranquil, if not stupefying. But people then were in a state of frenzy over a succession of cultural changes: the impact of TV, of suburbanization, of newborn rock 'n' roll, etc. Wertham's contribution was to link comic books to worries about "juvenile delinquency," arguing that comics turned good kids into killers.

Wertham inspired a congressional witch-hunt that killed EC's famous horror series. He's also responsible for the "code" adopted by the comics industry that infantilized the medium for years to come.

The good doctor lives. The current debate over "cultural pollution" and the baneful effect of the Internet and video games is the same moral panic over new media. Indeed, Wertham was himself a replay of a social script that had earlier involved penny dreadfuls, pulp novels, and bobbed hair. Moral panic is the last refuge of the left behind, and turns good people into Bowdlers.

—Charles Paul Freund

Poverty in the Midst of Plenty

Douglass C. North is a senior fellow, Hoover Institution; Spencer T. Olin Professor in Arts and Sciences, Washington University; and a Nobel laureate in economics (1993).

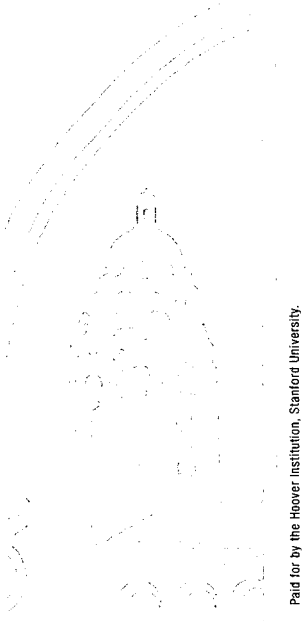
We live in a world where some countries enjoy a material abundance beyond the wildest dreams of our forefathers. Such countries are rich because they are productive. The sources of that productivity—growing markets, technological improvement, and investment in human beings (human capital)—all play an important part in increasing productivity. The new growth economics literature has formalized some of these findings, but economic historians, development economists, and specialists in growth accounting have broadly understood them for some time.

By any standard of measurement much of the world's population is still poor, with individuals subsisting on less than two dollars a day. The disparity between the well-being of the average person in the developed world, where per capita annual income may exceed $20,000, and that in low-income countries such as Haiti or most of sub-Saharan Africa, where it may be under $500 a year, is striking, especially when one sees up close the living conditions associated with such poverty.

How do we account for the persistence of poverty in the midst of plenty? If we know the sources of plenty, why don't poor countries simply adopt policies that make for plenty? The answer is straightforward. We just don't know how to get there. **We must create incentives for people to invest in more efficient technology, increase their skills, and organize efficient markets.** Such incentives are embodied in institutions. Thus we must understand the nature of institutions and how they evolve.

Institutions are the framework that humans create to structure human interaction. They are made up of formal rules (constitutions, laws, and regulations) and informal constraints (conventions and norms of behavior) and the way both are enforced. Well-specified property rights that reward productive and creative activity, a legal system that enforces such laws at low cost, and internal codes of conduct that are complementary to such formal rules are the essential underpinning to productive economies. But well-specified property rights and an effective legal system are the creation of the political structure. Unfortunately, we do not know how to put such a political structure in place. Informal norms of behavior that make for honesty, integrity, and hard work are the product of long-term human interaction; we do not know how to create them in the short run. The result has been that **efforts to improve the performance of poor countries have been something less than a rousing success.** Sub-Saharan Africa remains a basket case, and our efforts to transform the diverse parts of the former Soviet Union into productive economies have so far been a dismal failure. But we are getting a better understanding of the process of political-economic change. The sources of informal constraints such as norms of behavior are a major modern priority in the social sciences and down the road will result in accelerating the reduction of poverty.

— Douglass C. North



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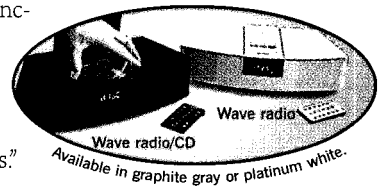

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